THUNDERBOLTS®

NO MERCY

"This book remains one of pure, violent fun."
— ComicVine.com

SOULE
BARBERI
LUQUE

MARVEL NOW!

VOL 4

NO MERCY #1
THE
FIRE
FOUND
CHARLES SOULE
CARLO BARBERI
ALL-NEW MARVEL NOW!
020. NOW

NORTHERN MICHIGAN.
THE PETOSKEY STONE DINER.

CLOSED.

"GIVE ME A MINUTE TO CHECK THIS OUT."

LOCKED UP TIGHT. LET ME SEE IF I CAN JUST--

WHAM

HUH.

PETOSKEY STONE
DINER
Curbside Service with a Smile!
OPEN ALL NIGHT
Diner
BURGERS
MALT

CREEEEEAAK

WHY, MAJOR THADDEUS ROSS! IT'S BEEN AN AGE. WELCOME BACK TO THE PETOSKEY STONE, SUGAR!

I HAVEN'T BEEN A MAJOR FOR TWENTY--

WHAT'S IN THERE, TB? YOU FIND SOMETHING?

DEADPOOL-- NO!

WHOA.

UNAUTHORIZED PERSONNEL DETECTED. PLEASE PROVIDE SECURITY CREDENTIALS IMMEDIATELY. LETHAL FORCE HAS BEEN AUTHORIZED TO DEFEND THIS FACILITY.

OOF!

LITTLE HELP???

KRRAWCH

THANKS.

GET UP.

ALL RIGHT, PEOPLE--I WASN'T EXPECTING A DINER FULL OF ROBOT REDNECKS, BUT A DINER FULL OF ROBOT REDNECKS IS WHAT WE'VE GOT.

TIME TO GET BUSY.

AT LEAST WE'RE OUT OF THE VAN.

WHAT *ARE* THESE?

LMDS, THOMPSON. PART OF THE SECURITY SYSTEM FOR THIS PLACE. THEY MUST HAVE LEFT THEM RUNNING WHEN THEY MOTHBALLED IT, JUST IN CASE.

WHY DOES A DINER NEED A SECURITY SYSTEM?

IT'S NOT A DINER. GO TO THE JUKEBOX.

I'LL DO IT! NEVER A BAD TIME FOR A FEW TUNES. I'VE GOT GREAT TASTE IN MUSIC.

LET'S SEE...

THIS IS ONE OF A FEW ENTRY POINTS TO A RESEARCH FACILITY I THOUGHT WE COULD USE AS A HOME BASE FOR THE TIME BEING, SINCE WE LOST THE SUB IN NEW YORK.

IT WAS A WORKING DINER FOR YEARS--PATTY MELT WAS PRETTY GOOD.

I *KNEW* KEEPING THESE POUCHES WOULD PAY OFF ONE OF THESE DAYS!

THE JUKEBOX IS THE GATE. PICK THE RIGHT THREE SONGS AND IT LETS YOU IN.

RISKY. WHAT IF SOMEONE CHOSE THEM ACCIDENTALLY?

IMPOSSIBLE, ELEKTRA. NO ONE EVER WOULD. THE CODE CALLS FOR *"WHITE CHRISTMAS,"* FOLLOWED BY A NOVELTY SONG ABOUT SURGEONS, OF ALL THINGS-- CAN'T RECALL THE TITLE, AND FINALLY THE SEVENTH TRACK ON A RECORD FROM A BAND CALLED--I'LL NEVER FORGET THIS--

WURRTT

!

I BETTER GET MY #$%^& QUARTER BACK.

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

RESEARCH, CASTLE, LIKE I SAID. IT'S WHERE THE GOVERNMENT USED TO BRING ALL THE SALVAGED TECH--OR ANYTHING ELSE THEY FOUND--AFTER THE END OF A BIG SUPER-FIGHT. COSMIC WHATSITS TEND TO DROP INTERESTING GEAR.

THEY'D TRY TO REVERSE-ENGINEER IT HERE. NEW INNOVATIONS FOR THE GOOD OLD U.S. OF A.

SUCH AS?

PUT IT THIS WAY: AMERICAN CHEESE ISN'T ACTUALLY AMERICAN. IT'S NOT EVEN FROM EARTH.

PLEASE--CAN WE HURRY? I HAVE TO CONNECT. I'M...DRIFTING. I'M AFRAID I'M GOING TO LOSE MYSELF.

THERE'S NO INTERNET HERE, STERNS. THE PLACE WAS ON A SECURE NETWORK. INTERNAL ONLY.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

YOU *KNOW* I HAVE TO CONNECT TO MY EXTERIOR MIND ON A REGULAR BASIS, EVER SINCE THAT *CREATURE* ATTACKED ME IN NEW YORK. IF I DO NOT, I WILL *LITERALLY LOSE MY MIND.*

I CANNOT CONNECT WITHOUT THE INTERNET.

WHY DID YOU BRING ME HERE?

BECAUSE *YOUR* CONCERNS ARE NOT NECESSARILY *MY* CONCERNS.

THIS PLACE HAS EXTERNAL COMMS-- YOU CAN USE THOSE TO CONNECT. THE TECH HERE IS TWENTY YEARS OLD, BUT THE MILITARY WAS USING THE NET EVEN THEN.

FINE. WHERE IS THE COMMUNICATIONS SUITE?

YOU'VE GOT A JOB TO DO FIRST.

WHAT? I'M NOT MUCH FOR MURDERING ROBOTS, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED.

NO, BUT THERE *IS* A DEACTIVATED GAMMA REACTOR THAT NEEDS A LITTLE TLC. COMMS WON'T WORK UNTIL IT GETS POWERED UP. IT'S DOWN THAT WAY.

AND, STERNS--I'D HURRY IF I WERE YOU.

WE WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO *LOSE YOUR MIND.*

BARRACKS ARE OVER THERE. EVERYONE FIND A SPOT TO BUNK DOWN. STASH YOUR GEAR, AND THEN WE'LL MEET BACK HERE IN TWENTY.

WE HAVE THINGS TO TALK ABOUT.

THIS IS TINY. WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GET CREATIVE.

FINE BY ME.

WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE, CASTLE?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I MEAN YOUR MISSION IS COMPLETE. YOUR WHITE WHALE IS DEAD. YOU DON'T NEED THIS TEAM ANYMORE. WHAT IS KEEPING YOU HERE?

THAT WAS THE DEAL. IF MY MISSION HAD COME UP LAST, I'D HAVE EXPECTED YOU TO BE THERE TO HELP ME GET IT DONE.

I'M NOT GOING TO LEAVE JUST BECAUSE I GOT WHAT I WANTED.

YOU AND THE FREAK WITH THE ALIEN COSTUME HELPED ME KILL THE PAGUROS. I'LL STAY UNTIL YOU TWO GET YOURS.

AND DEADPOOL. HE HELPED TOO, IN HIS WAY.

...

AND... DEADPOOL.

HURRY, SAMUEL. *HURRY.* FIX THIS WHILE YOU STILL CAN.

PIECE OF *JUNK.* ALMOST NO SHIELDING AT ALL BACK THEN. I'M SURPRISED THERE AREN'T HULKS AND ABOMINATIONS ON EVERY STREET CORNER.

AHH, HERE WE ARE. CORRODED. I START THIS REACTOR UP AND IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE IT BLOWS THIS FACILITY A MILE INTO THE AIR.

NNNGH

OHH, SAMUEL. THIS IS NOT GOOD.

NOT GOOD AT ALL.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE NEXT MISSION.

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS!

BOOM. LET'S DRAW SOME *NAMES.*

THAT HAT WAS ON THE SUB. THE SUB SANK. HOW DID YOU GET IT?

I DOVE DOWN TO GET IT BEFORE WE LEFT NEW YORK.

YOU DON'T LEAVE A HAT LIKE THIS BEHIND.

ALL I NEED NOW IS A NEW *FEATHER*, AND THEN IT'LL BE AS GOOD AS NEW.

WE DON'T NEED THE HAT. THIS TIME WE'RE DOING ONE FOR ME.

THERE'S ONLY ONE THING WE SHOULD BE WORRYING ABOUT RIGHT NOW, ROSS.

YEP--WE'RE ON THE SAME PAGE, THOMPSON.

MERCY.

"THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I THOUGHT SHE COULD BE AN ASSET TO THIS TEAM, BUT YOU ALL KNOW WHAT SHE DID IN NEW YORK, AND YOU KNOW WHAT I PROMISED HER TO GET HER TO STOP."

"SHE ALMOST DESTROYED THE CITY. SHE NEEDS TO BE ENDED."

"I AGREE, CASTLE. YOU KNOW WHAT SHE'S CAPABLE OF. YOU HAVE ANY BRIGHT IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO KILL HER, YOU LET ME KNOW."

ANY OF YOU?

THRMMMM--

AH, GOOD-- LIGHTS. NOW WE CAN SEE HOW FILTHY THIS PLACE *ACTUALLY* IS.

FORGET THE LIGHTS. ***MERCY.*** SHE'S SOME KIND OF ALL-POWERFUL ALIEN DEATH GODDESS. I PROMISED HER WE'D BRING HER MORE DEATH THAN SHE COULD HANDLE-- FEED HER ADDICTION.

I MADE THAT PROMISE WITH ***ZERO*** IDEA HOW TO ACTUALLY ACCOMPLISH SUCH A THING. SHE'LL FIND US SOON. WE HAVE TO ***DEAL*** WITH HER.

YOU GOT THE REACTOR GOING.

I DID, AND RIGGED UP A LINE TO THE OUTSIDE, TOO. I'M FEELING ***MUCH*** BETTER. WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

MERCY.

MERCY? SHE'S ***EASY*** TO HANDLE.

OH, ***REALLY?*** WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST, STERNS?

SHE THINKS SHE'S THE GODDESS OF MERCY, RIGHT? SHE'S HAPPIEST WHEN SHE'S SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE SEEKING THE SWEET RELEASE OF DEATH.

I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY ***WE*** APPEAL TO HER. PUNISHER ALONE HAS PROBABLY KILLED MORE PEOPLE THAN CHOLERA. NO OFFENSE, FRANK.

NONE TAKEN.

ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS POINT HER TOWARDS THE PLACE WITH THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF PEOPLE PRAYING FOR OBLIVION AND SHE'LL LEAVE US ALONE.

DO YOU HAVE A SUGGESTION, OR ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP TELLING US THINGS WE ALREADY KNOW? WHERE DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD SEND HER?

HELL, THADDEUS. STRAIGHT TO HELL.

THAT'S... ACTUALLY A PRETTY GOOD IDEA.

BUT HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GET HER THERE?

YOU KNOW...

"...WE ACTUALLY MIGHT KNOW A GUY."

NEVADA. HOOVER DAM.

WE'RE HERE WITH WORLD-FAMOUS MOTORCYCLE STUNT RIDER ***JOHNNY BLAZE***, JUST MINUTES AWAY FROM HIS ATTEMPT TO JUMP HOOVER DAM--THE SINGLE LONGEST CYCLE JUMP EVER ATTEMPTED AT NEARLY 800 FEET.

JOHNNY, THIS JUMP IS MORE THAN TWICE AS LONG AS THE PREVIOUS RECORD. MANY OF YOUR COLLEAGUES IN THE STUNT RIDER COMMUNITY HAVE CALLED YOU SUICIDAL TO EVEN ATTEMPT IT.

WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE TO THAT, AND HOW DO YOU ANSWER THOSE SAYING YOU'RE JUST DOING THIS TO DRAW ATTENTION AWAY FROM YOUR FAILED EFFORTS TO BECOME A HOLLYWOOD STAR?

MR. BLAZE?

NOT TOO LATE TO BACK OUT, JOHNNY. WE CAN BLAME IT ON MECHANICAL PROBLEMS WITH THE BIKE. NO ONE WOULD SAY A WORD.

YOU THINK I CAN'T MAKE IT, JOE?

Tours

NO, JOHNNY, I'VE GOT FAITH IN YOU, I JUST DON'T KNOW *WHY* YOU THINK YOU GOTTA DO THIS. YOU GOT NOTHIN' TO PROVE TO ANYBODY. SO YOU MADE TWO CRAPPY MOVIES--WHO CARES?

AND IF I'M BEING HONEST, THAT IS ONE *HELL* OF A JUMP.

HEY, JOE, WHAT'S THE HARDEST THING ABOUT STUNT JUMPING?

BELIEVING IN THE BIKE.

YOU GOT IT. LOSE FAITH IN YOUR BIKE AND YOU WOBBLE, AND YOU WOBBLE AND YOU'RE DEAD. AND SINCE YOU BUILT THIS BIKE FOR ME--BEST BIKE I'VE EVER HAD--I GOT FAITH TO SPARE.

SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE.

VROOOM

OH, DA--

BOOM

KRAAK

FWOOSH

FOOSH

I'M *TELLING* YOU, I'M FINE. I DON'T NEED TO BE HERE.

ONCE THE DOCTOR SAYS YOU'RE FINE, YOU'RE FINE. UNTIL THEN, MISTER BLAZE, YOU'RE ON YOUR DEATHBED, AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, AND YOU ARE GOING *NOWHERE.*

LAST PART MIGHT BE RIGHT.

DESK NURSE SAID WE COULD COME IN--THAT ALL RIGHT?

THESE FRIENDS OF YOURS?

I KNOW 'EM. PLENTY OF HISTORY WITH THESE TWO.

ALL RIGHT, THEN. I'LL LEAVE YOU ALONE.

HOW'D YOU KNOW I WAS HERE?

SON, YOU BLEW UP, FELL DOWN A CLIFF AND WALKED AWAY. THAT KIND OF STORY GETS AROUND.

HILARIOUS. OKAY, THEN, *WHY* ARE YOU HERE?

WE WERE HOPING YOU COULD HELP US WITH SOMETHING.

GET ME OUT OF HERE AND I'M ALL YOURS.

YOU SURE YOU GUYS DON'T WANT TO GET DR. STRANGE OR BROTHER VOODOO OR SOMEBODY? SPELLS WERE NEVER MY SPECIALTY. I'M MORE OF AN ASS-KICKER TYPE.

SO ARE WE. YOU'LL BE FINE.

OKAY. JUST SAYING, I'M A LITTLE RUSTY WITH ALL OF THIS STUFF.

NO WAY I CAN CONVINCE YOU TWO? SEVEN-POINTED STARS HAVE MORE POWER THAN FIVE. SIX IS NO GOOD, THOUGH. I'D NEED BOTH OF YOU.

I DON'T DO MAGIC.

THERE YOU HAVE IT.

OKAY. LET ME FIRE UP.

RRRAAGGHH!

ALL RIGHT. FOCUS YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS MERCY PERSON. BRING HER TO MIND AS CLEARLY AS YOU CAN. MY SPELL WILL CALL HER HERE, AND THEN IT WILL *SEND HER TO HELL.*

FOCUS! IT'S HAPPENING...

NOW!

FWOOOSH

OOPS.

CONTINUED.

THUNDERBOLTS

ALL-NEW MARVEL NOW!

CHARLES SOULE
CARLO BARBERI
ISRAEL SILVA

021

HELL.

THE BONESPIRE.

IS THIS THE ONLY WAY OUT, BLAZE?

WE NEED TO FIND A *PERSONAL HELL*. LAST I REMEMBER, THERE SHOULD BE SOME UP HERE.

SHOULD BE?

THINGS CHANGE IN HELL ALL THE TIME, THOMPSON. THEY'RE ALWAYS SHIFTING STUFF AROUND AS NEW SOULS SHOW UP.

AND WHEN THEY LEAVE, YEAH? ONCE THEY REDEEM THEIR SINS THROUGH DIABOLICAL SUFFERING? I MEAN, THAT'S THE DEAL, RIGHT?

THAT'S A PR SPIN. NO ONE LEAVES.

THERE'S A PLACE DOWN HERE-- THE *CUBICLE HELLS*. DAY STARTS AT NINE SHARP, AND *NEVER ENDS*.

IT'S GOT SIGNS POSTED ALL OVER THE PLACE: *"REDEMPTION IS AT THE DISCRETION OF MANAGEMENT."*

MANAGEMENT IS DEMONS.

THE *LAST* THING DEMONS CARE ABOUT IS REDEEMING SOULS.

GETTING INTO HELL IS EASY, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. BUT GETTING OUT?

GETTING OUT'S A *BITCH.*

WHY A *PERSONAL* HELL?

THE DEMONS HAVE TO USE A LOT OF A PERSON'S PSYCHE TO MAKE A PERSONAL HELL. THEY TEND TO BE METAPHYSICALLY CLOSER TO THE WORLD THE SOUL LEFT BEHIND. WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO BREAK THROUGH AND GET BACK UP TO EARTH.

AAH!

WSSH

FEELS WEIRD DOWN HERE, THOUGH.

DIFFERENT, SOMEHOW. NOT SURE WHY.

OOF.

THD

YAH!

WHAM

LET'S GET ON WITH IT.

I DO NOT APPRECIATE BEING *TOSSED.*

I AM NOT A SACK OF POTATOES.

YOUR HEAD DOES LOOKS LIKE A *TOMATO*, THOUGH. I BET RULK JUST GOT CONFUSED.

I HATE YOU.

HUH. THERE USED TO BE *TONS* OF PERSONAL HELLS HERE ONE AFTER THE OTHER, OOZING OUT OF THE GROUND LIKE TUMORS. NOW, I DON'T SEE...

WAIT.

THERE.

YEEEUGH. IS THAT... HAIR?

FEAR OF CHEETAHS. I HAVE THAT, TOO.

NO. FEAR OF HAIR. THE PERSON IN THIS HELL MUST BE TERRIFIED OF HAIR. UTTERLY FASCINATING.

NO, DON'T TOUCH--

GAH!

YES. MUST BE CHAETOPHOBIA.

WHAT THE HELL IS THAT, STERNS?

FOOOF

--THAT!

STERNS!

FOR SOMEONE AS SMART AS YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE, YOU DO SOME OF THE *DUMBEST* #$%& I HAVE *EVER SEEN.*

I'M NATURALLY CURIOUS! LIFE IS ABOUT CONSTANT, CONTINUAL LEARNING!

WHAT YOU *ARE* IS A CONSTANT, CONTINUAL LIABILITY. I'M SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING JUST LEAVING YOU DOWN HERE. HELL SEEMS ABOUT THE BEST PLACE FOR--

WHA--

THWUP

RRK!

WHAT THE HELL IS *THAT?*

I THINK...IS THAT ROSS'S *MUSTACHE?*

MY KINGDOM FOR A BOTTLE OF NAIR!

YOU HELP ROSS. I HAVE TO TALK TO THIS GUY.

YOU. YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF HERE?

MMF!

TYPICAL.

ALL RIGHT, HOLD ON.

SWOOSH

HOLD STILL, ROSS!

MMF!

EWWW. STINKS. SOMEONE SET A HIPPIE ON FIRE?

OH, THANK YOU, THANK YOU.

DO YOU WANT TO GET OUT? WE CAN *ALL* GET OUT, BUT YOU HAVE TO HELP ME.

DO YOU HAVE A RAZOR? ANYTHING SHARP?

PLEASE. I CAN FEEL IT GROWING BACK. A KNIFE? ANYTHING. HAVE TO STAY NICE AND SMOOTH. NICE AND CLEAN.

DAMMIT.

YES, THIS WILL DO. THIS WILL DO.

THIS GUY'S TOO FAR GONE.

WE HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER ONE.

YOU FOUGHT WELL AND BRAVELY, MUSTACHE.

I'M GOING TO TRY TO FORGET THIS EVER HAPPENED.

WHAT? DO YOU ACTUALLY HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE DOING?

EASY, POPS-- THIS ISN'T AN EXACT SCIENCE.

I'LL POP *YOU*, YOU INSOLENT PUP. WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED? YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BRING MERCY DOWN HERE, NOT US. I THOUGHT YOU WERE AN EXPERT!

I *TOLD* YOU, I'M NOT A SPELL GUY! I'M AN ASS-KICKER. WANT ME TO PROVE IT?

I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU *TRY*. FIGHTING A WAL-MART HALLOWEEN DISPLAY DOESN'T EXACTLY HAVE ME QUAKING IN MY BOOTS.

IF *ANYTHING* SCREWED UP MY SPELL, ROSS, IT WAS *THAT*. DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT IS? THAT'S A *HELL MARK*. IT MEANS YOU'VE BEEN CLAIMED.

WOULD HAVE BEEN NICE TO KNOW ABOUT THAT *BEFORE* YOU ASKED ME TO MESS AROUND WITH DEMON MAGIC. SOMEONE DOWN HERE THINKS YOU'RE THEIR LITTLE CHEW TOY. ANY IDEA WHO THAT MIGHT BE?

YOU DON'T THINK...

MAYBE, BUT I HOPE NO--

CRAZY

HELLO, BOYS.

UH-OH.

HMPH.

WHO IS THAT?

MEPHISTO. YOU KNOW HOW I WAS TALKING ABOUT HELL'S MANAGEMENT TEAM?

"HE'S THE CEO."

THE CRUCIBLE. THUNDERBOLTS HQ.

HOW LONG SHOULD WE WAIT?

I'M GIVING THEM FORTY-EIGHT HOURS. AFTER THAT, I'M GONE. I DON'T HAVE TIME TO SIT AROUND WHILE ROSS AND THE OTHERS GO ON MAGICAL ADVENTURES.

SO, YOU'RE JUST GOING TO... SIT HERE AND CLEAN YOUR GUNS?

GUNS CAN NEVER BE TOO CLEAN, ELEKTRA. YOU HAVE A BETTER IDEA?

MAYBE.

NOT NOW.

FINE, CASTLE. BUT I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE TWO DAYS WHEN I COULD BE EARNING.

SEE YOU WHEN I SEE YOU.

FINE.

BACK.

JUST TALKED TO MY GUY. HE'S GOT A JOB FOR ME. NOT FAR. YOU WANT TO COME?

...

ALL RIGHT.

WE CAN TAKE THE WAR WAGON.

NO. MY GIG, MY RIDE, AND WE'RE NOT TAKING THE ***WAR WAGON.*** IT SMELLS LIKE MEN AND BLOOD. ESPECIALLY AFTER THAT DRIVE TO GET HERE.

IT SMELLS FINE.

WHAT, THEN, ARE WE SUPPOSED TO WALK?

NO.

UNLESS THERE'S A USED CAR LOT AROUND HERE, THEN, I DON'T--

YOU SHOULD SPEND A LITTLE LESS TIME ***CLEANING YOUR GUN*** AND A LITTLE MORE TIME EXPLORING THIS PLACE, CASTLE. THIS BASE HAS INTERESTING THINGS STASHED ALL OVER.

SUCH AS?

SUCH AS.

LISTEN, MEPHISTO--THIS IS ALL A MISUNDERSTANDING. WE'RE JUST PASSING THROUGH. HONESTLY.

I HAVE LITTLE USE FOR HONESTY, SPIRIT. YOU MAY GO, IF YOU CHOOSE. IT IS ONE OF YOUR COLLEAGUES I REQUIRE.

HIM.

EXCUSE ME?

YOU ARE *MARKED.* YOU MUST SERVE ME WHEN I CALL.

I DON'T THINK SO.

YOU HAVE NO CHOICE IN THE MATTER.

MAKE ME.

DAMN YOU.

MAYBE, BUT NOT BY YOU.

I UNDERSTAND NOW. OF COURSE. THE REASON HELL FEELS DIFFERENT TO ME-- THE REASON HE CAN'T ENFORCE THAT HELL MARK--*HE ISN'T RUNNING THINGS DOWN HERE ANYMORE.*

HE'S *LOST THE THRONE.* ISN'T THAT RIGHT, MEPHISTO?

A MOMENTARY INCONVENIENCE. MEPHISTO IS NEVER DEFEATED FOR LONG.

WHO'S GOT IT?

A PRETENDER. HE DOES NOT EVEN HOLD *DEMON BLOOD.* AND WHAT IS WORSE, HE IS *RELEASING* SOULS. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN RECORDED MEMORY, HE IS SETTLING ACCOUNTS.

HE IS HELL'S *DESTRUCTION.*

NONE OF US CARE. COME ON. LET'S FIND ANOTHER WAY OUT OF HERE. WE STILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE MERCY PROBLEM.

THAT'D BE A GOOD BAND NAME. I'M GOING TO REMEMBER THAT. *THE MERCY PROBLEM.*

NO. WAIT. THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY HERE.

WE WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DEAL.

I...SEE. WHAT ARE YOUR TERMS?

WAIT A MINUTE. THIS IS THE *LAST* GUY YOU WANT TO DEAL WITH.

WE HAVE AN ENEMY. WE ATTEMPTED TO SEND HER HERE TO DISPOSE OF HER, BUT THE FLAMING MAN OVER THERE FAILED MISERABLY, AND NOW WE ARE HERE INSTEAD.

YOU KNOW WHAT? FINE. MAKE YOUR DEAL. SEE HOW IT PLAYS OUT, IDIOT.

IF YOU WERE RESTORED TO YOUR POSITION AS LORD OF HELL, COULD YOU BRING *HER* HERE, AND SEND *US* BACK TO EARTH?

WITH THE BAREST OF EFFORT.

EXCELLENT. THEN HERE IS WHAT WE PROPOSE--WE WILL DESTROY THE CURRENT KING OF HELL AND PUT YOU BACK ON YOUR THRONE, AND IN RETURN YOU WILL DO AS I JUST DESCRIBED.

UNLESS YOU OBJECT, THADDEUS?

I'LL DO WHAT IT TAKES TO SHUT MERCY DOWN. THIS WOULDN'T BE MY FIRST DEAL WITH A MONSTER, AND IT WON'T BE MY LAST.

IT IS AGREED, THEN. SHALL WE SHAKE ON IT?

OHHHH NO. FOR THIS, I SHALL REQUIRE A WRITTEN CONTRACT, PROPERLY NOTARIZED AND WITNESSED, MIND YOU.

AN ACTUAL DEAL WITH THE DEVIL. CHALLENGES SUCH AS THIS DO NOT COME ALONG EVERY DAY.

WE HAVE ONLY *BEGUN* TO NEGOTIATE.

IT IS POSSIBLE THAT I LIKE YOU.

I AM NOT SURPRISED.

LET US BEGIN.

KRRACK

CAN YOU TURN YOUR HEAD OFF?

NOT DOWN HERE.

THEN HOW DO YOU BRUSH YOUR TEETH?

I DON'T.

THAT'S NASTY, BRO.

OH!

WHAT?

I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING. I'VE GOTTA GET IN ON THAT DEAL THEY'RE DOING.

WHAT IS IT WITH THAT GUY?

NO IDEA. HE'S NUTS, BUT HE'S GOOD AT WHAT HE DOES. YOU DON'T THINK HE'S GOING TO COME THROUGH, AND THEN SOMEHOW HE DOES. SOMETIMES.

AND THE RED THING? YOU GUYS ARE ALL IN RED.

THIS IS SORT OF ROSS' THING, AND HE'S THE RED HULK, SO...

ALL WE NEED TO DO NOW IS RECRUIT DAREDEVIL, I GUESS.

I HATE THAT DUDE.

HUH? WHY? HE'S A GOOD GUY.

MAYBE HE IS, BUT I'M THE DAMN MOTORCYCLE STUNT JUMPER. I SHOULD BE DAREDEVIL. HE'S PROBABLY AN ACCOUNTANT OR SOMETHING IN REAL LIFE.

SUBCLAUSE 17(G)(II)(XX) NEEDS TO ADD REASONABLENESS LANGUAGE.

DONE, BUT THEN I NEED A BEST EFFORTS CLAUSE IN 18(C).

CONTEXTUAL BEST EFFORTS, NO MORE.

ARE YOU SCREWING ME HERE, STERNS? BECAUSE I WILL LITERALLY *EAT YOU* IF YOU ARE SCREWING ME.

CAN I GET IN ON THIS? I WANT TO GET IN ON THIS.

WHO'S THE TARGET?

MID-LEVEL CRIMINAL BOSS. WENT INTO HIDING AFTER HE STOLE ANOTHER CRIMINAL'S MONEY, AND NOW THAT GUY'S PUT OUT A CONTRACT.

THE USUAL.

I'LL SPLIT THE FEE WITH YOU.

NO.

NO? IT'S A LOT OF MONEY.

THAT'S... NOT WHY I DO IT.

MONEY'S AS GOOD A REASON AS ANY.

MAYBE FOR YOU.

I CAN INTRODUCE YOU AROUND. IF YOU EVER WANTED TO TRY IT.

NO.

WE'RE HERE.

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THREE VISIBLE, ALMOST CERTAINLY MORE INSIDE. MY THINKING IS YOU SNIPE FROM OUT HERE, WHILE I TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE DISTRACTION, SLIP INSIDE AND TAKE OUT THE TARGET.

YOU CAN HELP MOP UP INSIDE ONCE YOU TAKE DOWN WHOEVER MAKES IT OUT OF THE HOUSE.

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

WHAT?

HOW DO YOU ***KNOW?*** THAT THIS IS WHAT YOUR ***GUY*** TOLD YOU IT WAS? CRIMINALS KILLING CRIMINALS--I'M FINE WITH THAT.

BUT WHAT IF THIS IS WITNESS PROTECTION? WHAT IF THOSE GUARDS ARE FBI?

I ***KNOW*** BECAUSE I TRUST MY GUY. HE KNOWS MY LIMITS, AND HE KNOWS THAT IF I EVER FIND OUT HE LIED TO ME THAT I'M GOING AFTER HIM NEXT.

SO, I TRUST MY GUY, AND YOU TRUST ME. THAT'S HOW IT WORKS. BUT MAYBE YOU DON'T ***KNOW*** HOW THAT WORKS.

DO YOU TRUST ***ANYONE***, CASTLE?

EVERYONE I TRUST ENDS UP DEAD, OR THEY BETRAY ME AND ***THEN*** THEY END UP DEAD.

DO YOU ***WANT*** ME TO TRUST YOU, ELEKTRA?

BEGIN

NNGH!

WHERE ARE THEY???

I CAN'T *FEEL* THEM *ANYWHERE!!!* SAMUEL STERNS, THADDEUS ROSS... THEY ARE *MINE*, BUT I CANNOT *FIND THEM!!!*

I...

I KILLED THOSE PEOPLE FOR YOU--IT IS WHAT YOU WANTED, ELEKTRA NATCHIOS--I COULD FEEL IT. NOW REPAY MY GIFT, AND *TELL ME WHERE THEY ARE!!!* TELL ME...

...OR I WILL SHOW YOU NO MERCY.

SO I GOT INTO THE MOVIES BECAUSE I WAS SICK OF BEING AROUND SO MUCH EVIL ALL THE TIME. DEVILS, DEMONS, MONSTERS-- IT TAKES ITS TOLL.

A FEW FAKE STORIES, WHERE THE GOOD GUYS WIN-- SOUNDED PRETTY GOOD TO ME.

WHAT HAPPENED?

WELL, THE MOVIES SUCKED. THAT WAS PROBABLY A LOT OF IT. BUT I COULD HAVE STRETCHED IT OUT FOR A WHILE, MAYBE.

SO? WHY DIDN'T YOU?

THE SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE GOT BORED. IT LOOKED INTO ONE OF THE PRODUCERS, SAW THAT HE'D KILLED A DUDE ON A HIT AND RUN A FEW YEARS BACK AND CHARBROILED HIM.

THAT WAS IT FOR JOHNNY BLAZE IN TINSELTOWN.

HUH. YEAH, I CAN SEE HOW THAT WOULD WORK.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH YOU GUYS, ANYWAY? YOU A TEAM? YOU SEEM TO HATE EACH OTHER.

SORT OF. LIKE A TEAM OF CONVENIENCE. ROSS HAS US HELP HIM CLEAN UP SOME OF HIS MESSES, AND IN RETURN THE TEAM DOES ONE MISSION FOR EACH MEMBER, SOMETHING TOO BIG FOR US TO DO ALONE. WE PICK NAMES OUT OF A HAT.

FOR REAL?

YEAH. IT WORKS. SORT OF.

HUH. INTERESTING.

THERE. EXCELLENT. SIGNED BY GENERAL ROSS ON BEHALF OF THE TEAM, *INCLUDING* MR. WADE'S PROVISIONS AND WITNESSED BY MR. STERNS HERE. NOW, I CAN HAVE A NOTARY HERE IN A MOMENT, I'M SURE, AND THEN WE'RE OFF.

I'M A NOTARY.

FAIR ENOUGH, THEN.

THERE. THERE IS THE PRETENDER. THE ONE YOU HAVE AGREED TO DESTROY FOR ME. KILL HIM... KILL HIM NOW!!!

WAIT...

"...ISN'T THAT GUIDO?"

CONTINUED.

THUNDERBOLTS

Contract

ALL-NEW MARVEL NOW!

AR

SOULE
BARBERI
SILVA

022

HELL. THE THRONE ROOM.

YOU DIDN'T TELL US *STRONG GUY* IS RUNNING HELL!

YOU DIDN'T *ASK*. YOU WOULDN'T *BELIEVE* THE QUESTIONS PEOPLE FAIL TO ASK WHEN THEY MAKE DEALS WITH ME.

BUT...GUIDO'S A GOOD GUY. WHAT'S HE DOING DOWN *HERE*?

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A *GOOD GUY*, MR. WILSON. SOME PEOPLE ARE JUST BETTER ACTORS.

SO HOW IS THIS SUPPOSED TO WORK? HOW DO WE GET YOU BACK ON THAT THRONE?

IT'S SIMPLE, REALLY--

NOTHING'S SIMPLE WHEN YOU EXPLAIN IT, MEPHISTO. LET ME.

HULK, YOU'VE GOT THAT HELL MARK ON YOUR CHEST, WHICH MEANS YOU CAN BE MEPHISTO'S CHAMPION. I CAN DO IT TOO. ONE OF US JUST NEEDS TO GET UP THERE, CHALLENGE STRONG GUY, BEAT HIM, AND THEN THIS MONSTER'S BACK IN CHARGE.

THAT *DOES* SOUND SIMPLE, ACTUALLY.

IT'S NOT. THERE'S MORE.

"YOU DON'T GET TO CHALLENGE THE KING UNLESS YOU PROVE YOURSELF WORTHY."

"WHICH WE DO HOW, EXACTLY?"

"FIRST, YOU HAVE TO GET PAST HIS COURT."

GREAT.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? GET TO IT!

YEAH, WELL. I'M RETHINKING THIS A BIT. I'M NOT SURE FIGHTING A BUNCH OF DEMONS IN ORDER TO KILL GUIDO CAROSELLA IS EXACTLY WHAT WE SIGNED UP FOR.

ON THE CONTRARY, GENERAL...

...THAT IS *EXACTLY* WHAT YOU SIGNED UP FOR. READ THE AGREEMENT, SO ABLY NEGOTIATED BY MR. STERNS.

YOU DO NOT *HAVE* TO COMPLY, BUT THAT WOULD BE DEEMED A MATERIAL BREACH UNDER THE TERMS OF YOUR CONTRACT, WHICH WOULD MEAN I WOULD OWN ALL OF YOUR SOULS.

FRANKLY, I'M FINE EITHER WAY.

YOU BARGAINED AWAY OUR *SOULS?*

IT'S JUST A LIQUIDATED DAMAGES CLAUSE, YOU IDI-- *ERR*...GUYS. INSIGNIFICANT. ONLY COMES INTO EFFECT IF YOU WELCH ON THE DEAL.

AND I THOUGHT, WELL, THESE GUYS ARE *HEROES.* I HAVE FAITH IN THEM. THEY'D *NEVER* WELCH.

RIGHT?

WELL...

RIGHT. LET'S GO.

DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'RE GOING TO HELP?

DO I *LOOK* LIKE SOMEONE WHO HELPS?

BEST OF LUCK, GENERAL. I, TOO, HAVE FAITH IN YOU.

RRAAGHH!

THIS IS GOING TO TAKE FOREVER.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

KEEP THEM OFF ME FOR A MINUTE.

YOU OKAY HERE FOR A FEW MINUTES, VENOM? DEADPOOL?

BETTER THAN GOOD. WE'RE HAVING THE TIME OF OUR LIVES.

DO WHAT YOU GOTTA DO. I'M ROOTING FOR MEPHISTO HERE. WE GET THROUGH THIS, HE *OWES* ME.

ALL RIGHT. HULK, GET ON.

BEHIND YOU?

JUST DO IT.

ALL *RIGHT.*

HOLD ON.

REWWW

YOU WANT ME TO DO IT?

NO. THIS WHOLE THING IS MY MESS. I NEED TO BE THE ONE WHO CLEANS IT UP.

GUIDO, I WOULDN'T DO THIS UNLESS I HAD TO. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT.

I'M FIGHTING FOR MEPHISTO HERE. HE WANTS HIS DAMNED THRONE BACK.

SO GET DOWN HERE AND LET'S HASH IT OUT.

SOUNDS... GOOD.

WHERE ARE THEY? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH THADDEUS ROSS AND SAMUEL STERNS?

TELL ME NOW, ELEKTRA NATCHIOS, OR YOU WILL BURN!!!

BANG BANGBANG BANG

HEY. MERCY. THAT'S YOUR NAME, RIGHT?

YOU KNOW WHAT THEY CALL *ME?* PUNISHER.

NEVER HAD MUCH USE FOR *MERCY.*

WHAM

THOM

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING DOWN HERE, GUIDO? YOU DON'T BELONG HERE.

I DO. I GAVE UP MY SOUL. THERE'S NO BETTER PLACE FOR ME.

WHY'D YOU GO AND DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

I DID IT TO SAVE SOMEONE I LOVED--AND IT BOUGHT ME *ALL THIS.*

ANYONE ELSE RUNNING THIS PLACE WOULD BE ***SO MUCH WORSE***, ROSS. AT LEAST I'M REDEEMING SOULS. I'M LOST, BUT SOME OF THESE OTHERS MIGHT NOT BE.

I CAN'T LET YOU TAKE IT FROM ME. NOT FOR *MEPHISTO.*

OOF!

KRAWWWM

ALL RIGHT. I SEE HOW THIS HAS TO GO.

RRRAAGG!!!

OKAY, GUIDO. YOU HATE THAT GUY--I GET IT.

BUT JUST LISTEN UP FOR A SECOND. I CAN HELP YOU. BECAUSE HERE'S THE TRUTH, PAL--

--MEPHISTO'S NOT THE ONLY RED DEVIL DOWN IN HELL TODAY.

BRAKKA BRAKKA BRAKKA BRAKKA

=NNF=

FRANK CASTLE.

WE COULD HAVE DONE SUCH GREAT THINGS.

NYYAAGH!

DIE!

I YIELD. I YIELD!!!

SMART CHOICE, SON.

YESSSSSSS!

HELL IS MINE. LET US HERALD MY RE-ASCENSION WITH A SYMPHONY OF ANGUISH!!!

HOLD THE MUSIC, PAL. WE GOT YOU YOUR THRONE BACK-- YOU OWE ME.

OH, FINE.

THERE.

NICE!

THAT'S NOT ALL YOU AGREED TO, MEPHISTO. LIVE UP TO YOUR END OF THE DEAL.

YOU *DARE* TO COMMAND THE *LORD OF HELL?*

PRETTY MUCH.

YOU KNOW HOW THIS WORKS, MEPHISTO. GET IT DONE.

ANYTHING TO GET THIS *OVER* WITH, I SUPPOSE.

BEG FOR IT!!! *BEG FOR MY MERCY!!!*

NGH

EH? WHAT... *IS* THAT? SOMETHING *PULLING...*

NOOO!

POP

KRK-THUP

THERE. AS PROMISED.

WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE?

I HAVE NEVER FELT...SO *MANY*... SO *MANY* DESPERATE FOR MY RELEASE!

IS THIS...IS THIS...

HEAVEN???

NOOOO!!!

NICE, RIGHT? I NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE ABLE TO REPLACE THAT FEATHER--NOT REALLY, BUT *THIS*...THIS IS EVEN *BETTER*.

SHZZK

BUT, UH, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CLOSE THAT GATE THING.

WHAT? WHY?

AAAARRRRGHHHH!!!

YOU BRING SOME SORT OF *SOUL-VACUUM* INTO MY KINGDOM, AND YOU FOLLOW IT UP WITH AN *ENTIRE HEAVENLY HOST?*

YOUR SUFFERING WILL BE LEGENDARY, EVEN IN HELL!!!

AHEM.

I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IS ENTIRELY ACCURATE.

WE HAVE FULFILLED THE TERMS OF OUR AGREEMENT *TO THE LETTER.*

AND IF YOU REVIEW SECTION 134(A)(1)(X)(IV)(C) OF SUCH AGREEMENT, YOU WILL SEE THAT YOU ARE PROHIBITED FROM RETALIATORY ACTIONS OF *ANY KIND* IN ASSOCIATION WITH OUR FULFILLMENT OF SUCH AGREEMENT.

ANY SUCH ACTIONS WOULD BE DEEMED A *MATERIAL BREACH*, IN WHICH CASE *YOU*, AND THE ENTIRETY OF HELL, WOULD BELONG TO *ME.*

FRANKLY, I'M FINE EITHER WAY.

I AM THE VERY *SOUL* OF EVIL. YOU DARE TO MAKE AN ENEMY OF ME?

YOU MIGHT--*MIGHT*--BE MORE EVIL, BUT I'M *DEFINITELY* SMARTER.

YOU...*WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?*

I'M THE LEADER. PAY ME A VISIT ANY TIME. THIS HAS ALL BEEN RATHER FUN.

IT'S DONE. HE'S GOING TO SEND US HOME.

YOU MADE THE RIGHT DECISION. YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS IN HELL. YOU'RE MEANT FOR BETTER THINGS. WANT TO COME WITH US?

NO. NOT UNTIL I GET MY SOUL BACK. AND IT SEEMS LIKE IF THAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN HERE.

ALL RIGHT. BUT I OWE YOU. IF THERE'S EVER ANYTH--

--ING I CAN DO FOR... EH?

DO SOMETHING!!! HE'S DYING!

CAN YOU HELP HIM, STERNS?

I AM NOT A MEDICAL DOCTOR. BUT IF I WERE, I WOULD SAY THAT THE BEST WE COULD DO FOR HIM WOULD BE TO PUT HIM OUT OF HIS MISERY.

SCREWWW YOUUU....FRRREAK

HUH?

TWITCH

DEADPOOL! WHAT ARE YOU--

I DON'T KNOW--IT'S NOT ME, IT'S THE--

NYAAAAGH!

...HOW?

I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.

THE FEATHER--IT'S LIKE IT *KNEW* YOU--LIKE IT WANTED TO BE NEAR YOU, TO *HELP* YOU.

BUT IT'S FROM AN *ANGEL*. WHY WOULD AN ANGEL FEATHER CARE ABOUT *YOU*, CASTLE? YOU'RE THE *WORST*.

HEY. ROSS.

WHAT IS IT, BLAZE?

I THINK I...*NEEDED* THAT. I CAN TRY TO KID MYSELF, BUT THIS THING I GOT INSIDE ME--IF I'M NOT FIGHTING EVIL, IT AIN'T HAPPY. AND NEITHER AM I.

YOUR WHOLE DEAL HERE--THE MISSIONS, THE TEAM. YOU GOT ROOM FOR ONE MORE?

MAYBE. BUT YOU GOTTA KNOW GOING IN--THIS AIN'T THE AVENGERS. NOT ALWAYS BLACK AND WHITE WITH US.

YEAH?

SUITS ME FINE.

WHOOSH

END.

THUNDERBOLTS®

CHARLES SOULE

CARLO BARBERI

ALL-NEW MARVEL NOW!

NICE.

THE CRUCIBLE. THUNDERBOLTS HQ.

YOU HAVE LOVELY HANDWRITING, DEADPOOL.

THANK YOU, ELEKTRA. I THINK IT'S A CRIME, THE WAY SCHOOLS TODAY NEGLECT THE FUNDAMENTALS.

ALL RIGHT, DEADPOOL. YOUR NAME CAME OUT OF THE HAT, AND THAT MEANS, GOD HELP US, YOU GET TO CHOOSE THE NEXT MISSION. WHAT'S IT GONNA BE, SON?

I HAVE BEEN *WAITING* FOR THIS, LIKE YOU WOULD *NOT BELIEVE*. OKAY, HERE'S WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO. FIRST, WE NEED TO KIDNAP RYAN REYNOLDS. THEN--

WAIT.

I HAVE SOMETHING TO ASK YOU. I EXPECT YOU TO SAY NO, BUT I FIGURE IT'S WORTH A SHOT.

COLOR ME...INTRIGUED, FLASH. PRAY CONTINUE.

LET ME HAVE THIS ONE. LET ME CALL THIS MISSION.

AND SUDDENLY I FIND MYSELF DEEPLY UNINTERESTED.

WHY?

BECAUSE I'M LEAVING THE TEAM.

THIS ISN'T A MILITARY OUTFIT, THOMPSON--YOU CAN LEAVE WHENEVER YOU WANT. BUT WE'RE DOING GOOD WORK HERE. WHY DO YOU WANT TO GO?

THE *GOALS* ARE GOOD--GENERALLY--BUT THE *METHODS*... I DON'T WANT TO BE A CLICHE, ROSS, BUT THIS ISN'T WHAT I SIGNED UP FOR.

IT'S HARD ENOUGH TO HOLD THE SYMBIOTE BACK AS IT IS--IT *ALWAYS* WANTS ME TO GO FURTHER, TO BE MORE BRUTAL, TO KILL WHETHER I NEED TO OR NOT. IT WANTS *CONTROL*.

AND AROUND YOU GUYS--IT SEEMS LIKE IT NEVER TAKES MUCH TO GET US INTO A SITUATION WHERE KILLING IS THE EASIEST WAY OUT.

NO OFFENSE.

WE ALL KNOW WHAT WE ARE. THIS ISN'T A FOOTBALL GAME, QUARTERBACK. IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE WAY WE WORK, YOU PROBABLY *SHOULD* GO.

I WANT TO LET THE SYMBIOTE TAKE OVER, AND I WANT YOU GUYS TO TAKE IT DOWN. THAT'S IT.

HUH. FINE, BUT IT'S NOT UP TO ME. THIS IS DEADPOOL'S SHOW. IF HE WANTS TO GIVE YOU HIS--

THIS IS *HIGHLY* IRREGULAR. DEADPOOL'S NAME WAS CHOSEN, AND IF WE DO NOT HONOR THAT, WHAT DOES THAT MAKE--

DONE.

!!

ARE YOU SURE? THIS WON'T BE EASY. THE SYMBIOTE'S *TOUGH*, AND WITHOUT ME HOLDING IT BACK--

I SAID *DONE*. I CAME UP WITH A PLAN TO TAKE OUT EACH AND EVERY MEMBER OF THIS TEAM AGES AGO, AND NOW YOU JUST WANT TO *GIVE* ME A CHANCE TO USE ONE OF THEM? DONE AND *DONE*.

WHEN DO WE START?

SNAP

NOW. IF I EVER REALLY LOSE IT, IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN WITHOUT WARNING.

I'LL TRY NOT TO KILL Y--

RRAGH!

TAKE IT DOWN!!!

AAH!

SKREEUNCH

IT'S HEADING INTO THE VENTS! STOP IT!

SSSSSS

I THOUGHT HE WANTED US TO FIGHT HIM?

THOMPSON WANTED TO FIGHT. VENOM JUST WANTS TO ESCAPE, TO GET OUT INTO THE WORLD AND DO GOD KNOWS WHAT.

I'LL TURN ON THE EXTERIOR DEFENSE GRID FOR THE BASE--IT WON'T GET PAST THAT. NO WAY.

THE REST OF YOU, SPLIT UP, AND STAY IN CONTACT. FIND IT. IT'S VULNERABLE TO FIRE AND SONICS, BUT BE CAREFUL. WE'VE ALL SEEN VENOM FIGHT. WE KNOW WHAT IT'S CAPABLE OF.

SOON.

HERE, KITTY KITTY.

SSSSS

HA!

NNGH!

YOU CAME AFTER ME FIRST? YOU KNOW I'M *MADE* OF FIRE? YOUR BIG WEAKNESS?

YEAH?

FLAME ON, THEN. BURN THIS ONE'S LUNGS OUT.

DAMN YOU!

MY HOST THINKS YOU SHOULDN'T EXIST, YOU KNOW THAT? HE THINKS YOU'RE AN ABOMINATION. HE PRETENDS HE LIKES YOU, BUT HE ISN'T GOING TO SHED ONE TEAR OVER YOU AFTER WE KILL YOU.

HELLFIRE AIN'T ALL I GOT, PAL. THING LIKE YOU, MUST HAVE PLENTY OF SIN IN YOUR PAST. PENANCE STARE'S GONNA HAVE A *FIELD DAY* WITH *YOU*.

YAAAARGH!!!

SO... MUCH...SIN... SO...MANY... LIVES...

HEH.

SPLACK

INCENDIARY BULLETS. I HAVE ENOUGH FOR BOTH OF US. YOU KNOW THE BASE LAYOUT BETTER THAN I DO--WE CAN CANVAS TOGETHER AND TAKE THAT THING OUT.

YOU AREN'T CONCERNED ABOUT ACCIDENTALLY KILLING THOMPSON AS WELL?

NO. I'M NOT.

YOU HEARD HIM. HE WANTS US TO TAKE HIM DOWN. WAY I SEE IT, THE MONSTER WON'T LET HIM KILL HIMSELF, SO HE'S ASKING US TO DO IT.

FIRST THING HE'S DONE THAT MAKES ME RESPECT HIM.

YOU'RE HERE BECAUSE I CAN ***RELY*** ON YOU. YOU ASKED ME NOT LONG AGO IF I TRUST YOU. WELL, NOW YOU KNOW.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT TRUST, CASTLE. WE'RE KILLERS, BUT WE'RE NOT ***MURDERERS.***

THOMPSON DIDN'T ASK US TO KILL ***HIM***, HE ASKED US TO KILL ***IT.***

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

NNF!

AGH!

HE THINKS ABOUT HER, YOU KNOW. HE'S WAITING FOR YOU TO DIE SO HE CAN HAVE HER. HE HOPES IT WILL BE SOON.

SOONER FOR YOU.

YOU THINK? I DON'T. BETTER MEN THAN YOU HAVE TRIED, AND HERE I AM.

YOU SHOULDN'T BE WORRIED ABOUT BETTER *MEN*.

NNNNGH

M34 WP

THK

EEEEEEEEEEEE!!!

WHOOSH

VISION ALMOST GONE. MAYBE 20%.

I'M SORRY, FRANK--IT WAS THE ONLY WAY I COULD SEE TO GET US FREE.

NOT COMPLAINING. WHITE PHOSPHOROUS. RIGHT CALL. YOU KILL IT?

DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE!!!

NO. WE NEED TO RUN. I'LL GUIDE YOU.

HERE!

PULL!

THIS WON'T KEEP ME OUT. NOTHING WILL KEEP ME OUT. I ALWAYS FIND A WAY. I ALWAYS FIND A WAY!!!

HAHAHAHAHA

EH?

WHAT IS THIS? SOME... POWDER?

THAT'S PURE MAGNESIUM.

I ADVISE YOU TO LAY DOWN AND DIE, YOU FOOLISH BEAST.

MAGNESIUM...

...SO?

ARGH!

SLAM

YEEARGH!

MMMMM.

YOU, I'LL SAVE FOR LATER.

DRINK YOU DRY.

THWAM

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, THOMPSON. STOP BEFORE YOU GET HURT.

FLASH ISN'T HEEEEEERE RIIIIIGHT NOOOOW, ***THUNDERBOLT***. HE THINKS YOU'RE THE WORST OF ALL, THOUGH. WORSE THAN PUNISHER, WORSE THAN LEADER--BECAUSE YOU ***DON'T KNOW HOW BAD YOU ARE.***

YOU THINK THAT IF PEOPLE WOULD JUST ***UNDERSTAND***, THEY'D SEE YOU'RE THE ***REAL HERO***.

SHUT ***UP!!!***

AHHHAHHHAHAHA!

AHHAHAHA!

I REQUIRE MEDICAL ATTENTION.

LATER. SUCK IT UP, STERNS. WE HAVE BIGGER FISH TO FRY THAN YOUR LITTLE BOO-BOO.

WHAT WAS THE WHITE STUFF?

MAGNESIUM. I WAS ***CERTAIN*** THAT WAS A SYMBIOTE WEAKNESS. MY OTHER BRAIN, MY ***INTERNET*** BRAIN TOLD ME, AND--

INTERNET? A WEBSITE? WHICH ONE?

...

WIKIPEDIA. I AM NO LONGER CONVINCED IT IS ENTIRELY RELIABLE.

WE'RE GOING ABOUT THIS ALL WRONG.

ARE ANY OF YOU OUT OF THE FIGHT?
I'M GOOD. TOOK ME A LITTLE WHILE, BUT I'M COMING BACK.
NO.
I AM *DONE* WITH THIS. I DO NOT WISH TO FIGHT THE MONSTER, AND I WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE.
VISION'S ALMOST BACK. I WANT THAT THING *DEAD.*
VENOM'S TAKING US APART. ONE BY ONE. THIS ISN'T ABOUT THOMPSON'S LITTLE MISSION ANYMORE--IT'S ABOUT *SURVIVAL*, AND MAKING SURE THAT MONSTER DOESN'T GET OUT INTO THE WORLD.
I KNOW IT DOESN'T COME NATURALLY, BUT IF WE'RE GOING TO MAKE IT THROUGH, WE HAVE TO WORK *TOGETHER.*
I HAVE A PLAN. WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.
WE AREN'T A TEAM. I KNOW THAT. BUT MAYBE JUST THIS *ONCE* WE CAN ACT LIKE ONE. I'LL NEED *EACH AND EVERY ONE* OF--
...
WHERE'S DEADPOOL?

AL--MOST--THERE...

GOOD ENOUGH.

AND SO IT BEGINS.

HMMM...

HMMMMM...

HMMMMMM...

NAH.

HEY, CASTLE. LIKE IT? VENOM DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE.

YOU'RE AN IDIOT.

YEAH...CAN YOU, LIKE, JUST STAY STANDING RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE FOR A MINUTE? I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

DEADPOOL. I NEED YOU. I HAVE A PLAN FOR VENOM, AND YOU HAVE A JOB TO DO.

UHH, I THINK I'VE GOT IT UNDER CONTROL.

SNAP

TRRRASH

MAAAAAN.

GET DRESSED, DEADPOOL.

THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU, BUT I'M NOT ACTUALLY SPIDER-MAN.

TOO BAD FOR YOU.

SSSSSSSSSSSS

YOU KNOW, I'LL *NEVER* TURN DOWN A CHANCE TO STAB A MONSTER WITH A SWORD. BUT IN MY HEART OF HEARTS, I THINK WE BOTH KNOW...

...THE PLANE WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!!!

THWIPP

OH, COME ON.

CHOKE...
ON...

SSSSS

-URK-

BLUUURGH

...IT.

STAB

RRAAHH!

ZOOOOM

NNNYAAARGH!

SSSS!!!

STILL LAUGHIN', CHUCKLES?

AAAAGGGH!

WHOOOSH

RRRRRR

THUD

ALL YOURS, ROSS.

LOOKS LIKE DEADPOOL BOUGHT US ENOUGH TIME. THIS THING GOING TO WORK, STERNS?

I'VE DONE THE BEST I COULD WITH *ONE ARM*, THADDEUS. I MAKE NO GUARANTEES.

IF IT *DOESN'T*, I'M FEEDING YOU TO THAT THING.

STAND BACK.

I DESERVE BETTER THAN THIS.

YAH!

CLAP

THWOMMMMMMMM

WHA--?

EEEEEEEE!!!

UUUUUGH

YOU ALL RIGHT?

I CAN STILL TASTE DEADPOOL, BUT BESIDES THAT...YES. THANK YOU. I KNEW YOU COULD DO IT.

WASN'T EASY. WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO WITH IT? WE CAN CONTAIN IT, AT LEAST UNTIL WE FIGURE OUT A WAY TO KILL IT.

NO.

YOU DON'T KNOW THIS THING. IT ALWAYS SURVIVES. IF I LET IT GO, IT'LL JUST FIND SOMEONE ELSE.

CHANCES ARE IT'LL BE SOMEONE WORSE. I SAW IT TAKE OVER ***SPIDER-MAN*** NOT LONG AGO. HE'S A ***HERO***, AND EVEN ***HE*** COULDN'T CONTROL IT...NO.

THIS IS ***MY*** CURSE.

NO ONE ELSE SHOULD HAVE IT. ***EVER.***

YOU SURE YOU WANT TO GO? PLENTY FOR YOU TO DO HERE.

I KNOW. BUT IT'S TIME.

ALL RIGHT. JUST ONE MORE THING. YOU KNOW YOU TOOK THE SYMBIOTE BACK BECAUSE YOU ***WANT IT***, RIGHT? MAYBE EVEN ***NEED*** IT. DON'T KID YOURSELF.

IT WASN'T TO SPARE ANYONE ELSE, OR WHATEVER YOU WANTED THE OTHERS TO THINK.

YEAH. IT'S LIKE CASTLE SAID. WE KNOW WHAT WE ARE.

THE FIGHT WASN'T THE REAL MISSION. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

I DO.

YOU WANTED TO BE SURE THAT IF YOU LEFT, IF THE THING TOOK OVER, THAT SOMEONE OUT THERE COULD STOP IT. COULD STOP ***YOU***.

NOW WE KNOW. WE CAN DO IT. AND IF WE HAVE TO, WE WILL.

THE SYMBIOTE-- IT SAID SOMETHING. ABOUT ME. HOW YOU SEE ME. WAS IT LYING?

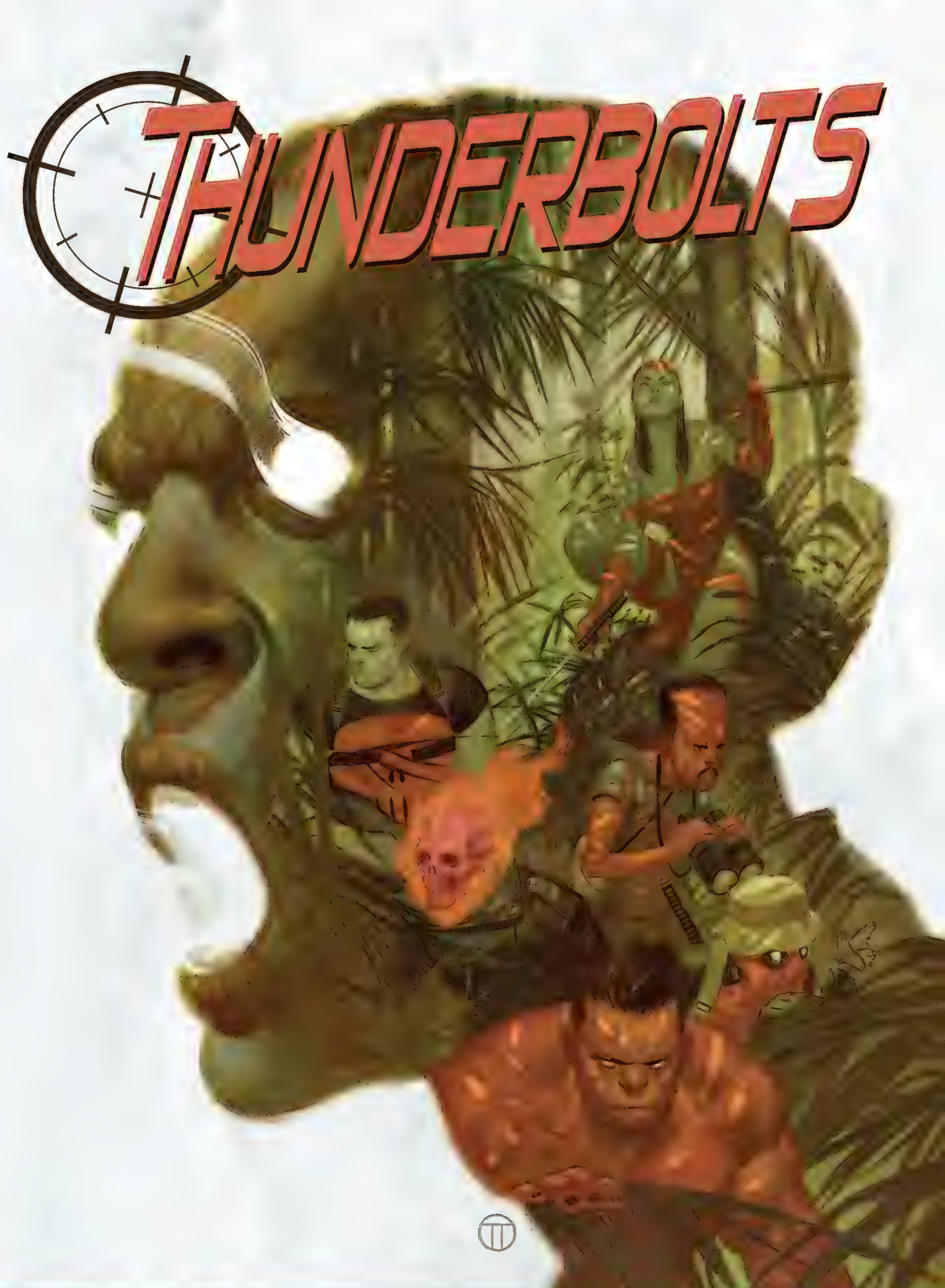
NO. IT DOESN'T REALLY DO THAT.

BUT EVERYONE CAN CHANGE.

TAKE CARE, SIR.

END.

THUNDERBOLTS



ALL-NEW MARVEL NOW!

SOULE · DIAZ · DASILVA

024

HONDURAS.

ESTRELLA CITY,
A FORGOTTEN TOWN ON A FORGOTTEN TRIBUTARY OF THE RIO PATUCA.

YOU AND I BOTH KNOW WE'RE THE WORST TWO PEOPLE IN THIS PLACE, CORDOBA.

WHICH IS WHY YOU'RE GOING TO *HELP* ME.

ROSS

US AIR FORCE

THE *WORST* TWO, ROSS? THAT'S QUITE A STATEMENT, CONSIDERING THE CLIENTELE.

BUT I KNOW YOU, AND YOU KNOW ME, AND I THINK PERHAPS YOU ARE CORRECT.

I HAD HEARD YOU HAD DIED--I AM GLAD TO FIND YOU ALIVE. YOU SEE, I AM *FOND* OF TERRIBLE PEOPLE. THEY OFTEN LIKE TO DO INTERESTING THINGS.

SO TELL ME ABOUT *YOUR* INTERESTING THING, GENERAL, AND WE SHALL *SEE* IF I WILL HELP YOU.

YEARS AGO, I SENT A TEAM DOWN HERE. THEY WERE SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING.

LIKE SO MANY OTHERS BEFORE THEM AND SINCE. THIS IS A PLACE OF MYSTERIES--SOME SAY THE *GREATEST* MYSTERY.

NO. THESE WERE DIFFERENT. THEY WERE MY GUYS.

ROSS

MANCUSO, HARRING AND PORTER. THREE OF MY BEST.

THEY CAME DOWN HERE, REPORTED IN THAT THEY'D HIRED YOU AS A GUIDE AND WERE HEADING UPRIVER.

THAT WAS THE LAST I HEARD FROM THEM. WHICH MEANS YOU WERE THE LAST VERIFIABLE PERSON TO SEE THEM ALIVE.

WHICH MEANS YOU'RE GOING TO HELP ME FIND THEM NOW.

SO LONG AGO, ROSS. AS I SAID, SO *MANY* MEN HAVE COME THROUGH HERE SEEKING THEIR FORTUNE.

PERHAPS THEY WERE SIMPLY SWALLOWED UP BY THE RIVER? IT IS A VERY *DANGEROUS* RIVER, AFTER ALL. NOT AN *ORDINARY* RIVER. NOT AT ALL.

HOW CAN I POSSIBLY RECALL? IF YOUR MEN DIED, THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME. WHAT REASON WOULD I HAVE TO SALVE YOUR GUILTY CONSCIENCE?

I HAVE HALF A MILLION REASONS FOR YOU, CORDOBA. AND ONE.

AMERICAN DOLLARS, NOT THAT TOILET PAPER YOU CALL CURRENCY DOWN HERE. TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO MY TEAM, SHOW ME WHERE YOU LAST SAW THEM, AND IT'S YOURS.

PERSUASIVE REASONS, IT IS TRUE.

BUT WHAT IS THE FINAL ONE?

AH.

YOU KNOW, GENERAL, MUCH HAS CHANGED SINCE LAST WE ENCOUNTERED ONE ANOTHER.

BACK THEN, I WANTED ***NOTHING*** MORE THAN MONEY FROM RICH AMERICANS. AS ***MUCH AS I COULD GET***. I TOOK EVERY JOB I WAS OFFERED--YES, EVEN THE ONE YOU MENTIONED.

WHY SO FOCUSED, YOU ASK? WHY SUCH DETERMINATION?

I HAD A ***DREAM***, GENERAL.

I WANTED ENOUGH MONEY THAT WHEN RICH AMERICANS CAME DOWN HERE WAVING THEIR CASH, THAT I COULD JUST TELL THEM TO ***GO HOME***. THAT I WAS BETTER THAN THEM. THAT I DID NOT ***NEED*** THEM. THAT I COULD NO LONGER BE ***BOUGHT***.

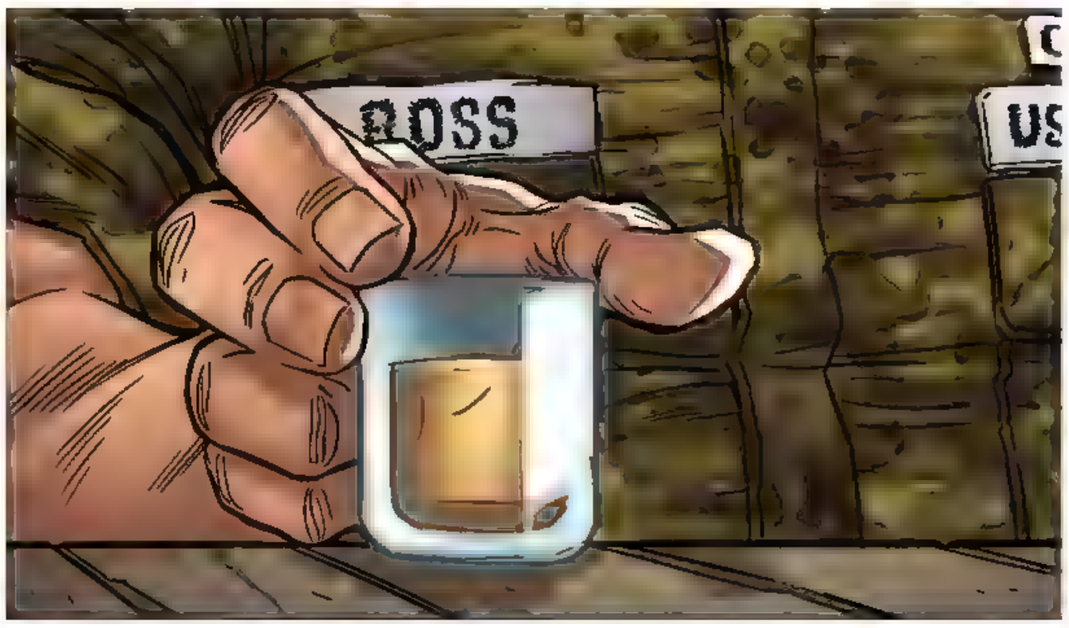
ROSS, MY OLD FRIEND, DREAMS DO COME TRUE. I ***RUN*** THIS TOWN NOW, AND EVERYTHING IN IT.

YOUR MONEY MEANS ***NOTHING*** TO ME.

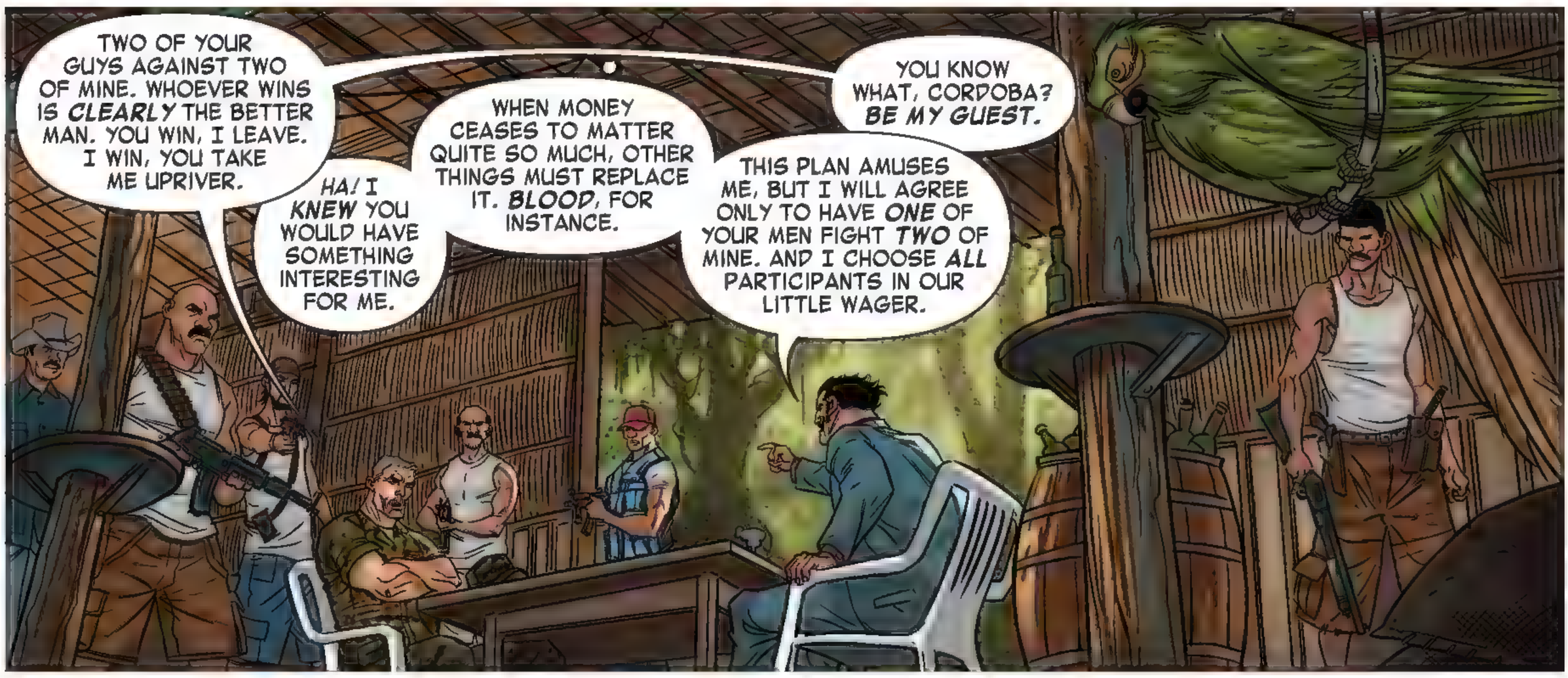
SO I SAY ***NO***, FILTHY AMERICAN. GO ***HOME***. I DO NOT CARE FOR YOUR ***LOST MEN***. THEY WERE FOOLS JUST LIKE YOU. I AM NO ONE'S ***GUIDE***, NOT UNLESS I WISH TO BE.

AND AS FOR ***THIS***--

--WELL, THIS DOES NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERN ME EITHER.


ROSS

SO THAT'S HOW YOU WANT TO DO IT?
FINE BY ME.


TWO OF YOUR GUYS AGAINST TWO OF MINE. WHOEVER WINS IS *CLEARLY* THE BETTER MAN. YOU WIN, I LEAVE. I WIN, YOU TAKE ME UPRIVER.
HA! I *KNEW* YOU WOULD HAVE SOMETHING INTERESTING FOR ME.
WHEN MONEY CEASES TO MATTER QUITE SO MUCH, OTHER THINGS MUST REPLACE IT. *BLOOD*, FOR INSTANCE.
THIS PLAN AMUSES ME, BUT I WILL AGREE ONLY TO HAVE *ONE* OF YOUR MEN FIGHT *TWO* OF MINE. AND I CHOOSE *ALL* PARTICIPANTS IN OUR LITTLE WAGER.
YOU KNOW WHAT, CORDOBA? *BE MY GUEST.*

EXCELLENT!
DECISIONS, DECISIONS.

THE PRETTY BOY? NO. YOU WOULDN'T HAVE HIM WITH YOU UNLESS HE IS MORE THAN HE SEEMS. I DO NOT LIKE UNKNOWN QUANTITIES.

PRETTY? NOT ALWAYS.

SOMETIMES I GET DOWNRIGHT *UGLY.*

SGS

MY POINT *EXACTLY.*

YOUR WOMAN--LOVELY, AND EFFECTIVE, I'M SURE, BUT A WOMAN NONETHELESS. AND I HAVE ***SOME*** HONOR LEFT. I WOULD NOT SEND MY MEN TO FIGHT A WOMAN. IT WOULD ***SHAME*** THEM.

THEY WOULDN'T HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE SHAME FOR VERY LONG. I PROMISE.

MMM.

AND THE OLDER ONE...HE STINKS OF DEATH, EVEN IN ***THIS*** PLACE. IT HANGS OVER HIM LIKE A CLOUD. I WOULD NOT PUT HIM ON A KILLING PATH--HE MIGHT NEVER STOP.

I DO NOT TRUST MEN IN MASKS. THIS ONE, NO.

I BET YOU'D TRUST ME EVEN LESS IF I TOOK IT OFF.

AND *THIS* MAN--THIS MAN I KNOW.

MR. STERNS, YOU HAVE CHANGED YOUR STRIPES SINCE THE LAST TIME WE HAD DEALINGS, BUT I SENSE THAT IS SIMPLY A ***COSMETIC*** ADJUSTMENT.

THE LEADER I KNEW WOULD ALREADY HAVE DEVISED TEN WAYS TO KILL EVERYONE IN THIS TAVERN, AND WOULD BE MERE MOMENTS FROM DOING SO.

YOU HAVE EARLY STAGE BOWEL CANCER. I CAN SMELL IT ON YOUR HORRIBLE, HORRIBLE BREATH. I COULD CURE IT FOR YOU, RIGHT HERE. BUT I WON'T.

AND IT'S ***SIXTEEN*** WAYS. AND COUNTING.

A DELIGHTFUL BUNCH YOU'VE ASSEMBLED, ROSS. KILLERS, EVERY ONE. THAT MUCH IS CLEAR.

DOES IT ***GALL*** YOU? WHERE ARE YOUR CLEAN-CUT ALL-AMERICAN HEROES? *AH*, NO MATTER. YOU FIT BETTER ***HERE*** THAN AMONG ANY GROUP OF ***HONORABLE*** MEN.

GET ***ON*** WITH IT, YOU PREENING ASS. PICK YOUR POISON.

OH, GENERAL, YOU KNEW HOW THIS WOULD GO FROM THE BEGINNING. I PICK THE WORST PERSON IN HERE.

I PICK ***YOU***.

AND HERE WE HAVE MY CHAMPIONS. FINE, LOYAL MEN. LET ME INTRODUCE YOU.

DON'T BOTHER. WE AIN'T GONNA BE SENDING EACH OTHER CHRISTMAS CARDS.

THIS WILL BE OVER IN TEN SECONDS, RIGHT? HE'LL HULK OUT AND THAT'LL BE THAT.

HE CAN'T. THE HULK THING'S A SECRET. IT'S BAD ENOUGH CORDOBA EVEN KNOWS HE'S ALIVE--

SO IT'S HAND-TO-HAND AGAINST THESE GUYS? HE'S LIKE 80 YEARS OLD. YOU THINK HE'S GOT A CHANCE?

HE'S AIR FORCE. THEY FIGHT WITH PLANES, NOT FISTS. YOU SEE ANY PLANES IN HERE?

SO THAT'S A NO?

...

WE'LL STEP IN BEFORE THEY KILL HIM.

ALL RIGHT, BOYS.

LET'S GET THIS DONE. I HAVE BUSINESS UPRIVER.

OOF!

AGH!

ENOUGH, OLD MAN?

JUST... GETTING...GOING... YOU *CLOWN.*

FLICK

GYAAAH!!!

WHAM

YOU GUYS SMELL THAT? IT'S... HMM. HARD TO DEFINE. SOPHISTICATED. LIKE... AN ASS MARGARITA, PERHAPS?

AAAAHH!

YOUR TURN, SON. UNLESS YOU'D RATHER JUST END THIS NOW.

CALL ME *SON*, I CALL *YOU* FATHER, *GRINGO*. I KILL MY *FIRST* FATHER AT THIRTEEN. YOU WAN' BE MY FATHER? NO PROBLEM. I KILL YOU TOO, JES' THE SAME.

CRAZY S.O.B.

WE'LL SEE.

AND THAT'S THE END, *PAPI*.

NNNGH.

WE'VE GOT TO HELP HIM.

WAIT. WATCH. I DON'T THINK THE OLD MAN'S DONE JUST YET.

SSSS

AIEEE!

WHA

M

SUPPOSE THAT ONE'S FOR YOUR DADDY, YOU PIECE OF GARBAGE.

RIGHT! TIME TO GO.

OF COURSE--LET ME JUST--

JUST NOTHING. YOU CALLED MY GUYS KILLERS. YOU WERE RIGHT. YOU DON'T KNOW *HOW* RIGHT, AND YOU *DON'T* WANT ME TO LET THEM OFF THE LEASH.

TIME TO GO.

RIVER PATROL. TAKES ME BACK.

YEAH?

YEAH. RIVERS ARE JUST ONE LONG AMBUSH OPPORTUNITY. THE JUNGLE HIDES THE BAD GUYS. WE CAN'T SEE THEM, BUT THEY CAN SEE US. NOTHING MORE CONSPICUOUS THAN A BIG, LOUD BOAT ON A FLAT, WIDE RIVER.

PLENTY OF TIME TO GET AHEAD OF AND BEHIND US. SET UP A FOUR-POINT CROSSFIRE.

AND YOU *LIKE* THAT?

DIDN'T SAY I LIKED IT. SAID IT TAKES ME BACK.

WHAT IS THIS ACTUALLY *ABOUT*, ROSS?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, ELEKTRA? I TOLD YOU. I LOST A TEAM DOWN HERE, AND I'M TRYING TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM.

PFFT.

YOU'RE A ***GENERAL***. YOU COMMAND MEN TO DIE FOR YOU AS A ***PROFESSION***.

BUT WE ARE NOT SOLDIERS, TO CHARGE BLINDLY FORWARD INTO DESTRUCTION ON YOUR WHIM. SO, THE TRUTH.

HMPH. ALL RIGHT.

YOU MAY NOT KNOW THIS, BUT THERE WAS A TIME THAT ALL I CARED ABOUT WAS DESTROYING THE HULK. THE...*OTHER* HULK--ANY WAY I COULD.

IF WE KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT YOU, ROSS, WE KNOW THAT.

RIGHT. WELL, HULK'S A TOUGH COOKIE. I HAD TO GO TO SOME ***SEVERE*** LENGTHS TO FIND WEAPONRY THAT EVEN HAD A CHANCE OF SCRATCHING HIS HIDE.

I CAST A PRETTY WIDE NET--I DIDN'T CARE IF IT WAS SOME OLD SUPER-SCIENCE PROGRAM, MAGICAL AMULETS, WHAT HAVE YOU. IF IT WAS POWERFUL, I WANTED IT.

THIS WAS ONE OF THE THINGS I FOUND.

WHAT IS IT?

IT'S A MAP...OR A LIST OF INSTRUCTIONS. I'M NOT SURE, EXACTLY. A PATH TO A SOURCE OF ANCIENT POWER. BACK IN THE DAY, THIS AREA WAS THE SEAT OF A KINGDOM--A STRONG ONE. ***THIS*** IS HOW THEY STAYED STRONG.

IT'S THE USUAL THING--THE PATH IS CURSED, FILLED WITH TRAPS, *YADDA YADDA*, BUT YOU GET THROUGH, YOU GET ULTIMATE POWER.

THAT'S ALL YOU KNOW?

IT WAS ENOUGH TO SEND MY BEST TEAM DOWN HERE TO INVESTIGATE. MANCUSO, HARRING AND PORTER. THEY HAD THIS WITH THEM.

...

THEY WERE GOOD MEN.

BUT IF THEY HAD THIS WITH THEM WHEN THEY DISAPPEARED, HOW DO ***YOU*** HAVE IT?

LISTEN.

"I WAS ON A PLANE. JUST FLYING, UP IN THE AIR BETWEEN HERE AND THERE.

"THERE WAS NO ONE IN THE SEAT NEXT TO ME AND THEN THERE WAS."

HELLO, SIR.

M-MANCUSO? *HOW?*

COME FIND ME, SIR. WE WENT WHERE YOU SENT US. COME. LET ME SHOW YOU.

COME TO ME, OR I WILL DESTROY IT ALL. *EVERYTHING.*

"AND THEN THE PLANE WAS GONE. *GONE.* I WAS 36,000 FEET UP.

"I...CHANGED IN THE AIR. FELL SEVEN MILES.

"I WAS OUT FOR A WHILE AFTER I HIT THE GROUND. DON'T KNOW HOW LONG. WHEN I CAME TO, I WAS HOLDING THE MAP."

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE WAS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED UP THERE.

BUT I LOOKED UP THAT FLIGHT I WAS ON. AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, IT ***NEVER EXISTED***. NEVER TOOK OFF, NEVER SCHEDULED AT ALL. THE PEOPLE...

...MAYBE THEY DISAPPEARED TOO--GOT ***ERASED***. DON'T KNOW MUCH OF ANYTHING, EXCEPT THAT I NEED TO STOP MANCUSO BEFORE HE DOES WHAT HE DID TO THAT PLANE TO...HELL, I DON'T KNOW. EVERYTHING, MAYBE.

SO IT'S NOT ABOUT THREE DEAD SOLDIERS. IT'S ABOUT TRYING TO COVER UP A MISTAKE BEFORE IT GETS ANY WORSE.

CALL IT WHAT YOU WANT.

FINE. BUT WE CAN'T EVEN READ THE MAP. HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO THIS?

YOU AND I CAN'T READ IT, TRUE.

BUT I'M BETTING ***HE*** CAN.

...MMM?

GET OVER HERE, STERNS. I NEED YOU.

I HAVE TO STAY OUT OF THIS TROPICAL UV. I COULD GET A SUNBURN.

WHO COULD POSSIBLY ***TELL?***

NOW, STERNS. IF YOU CAN'T MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL, YOU'RE JUST DEAD WEIGHT. DEAD WEIGHT GOES OVERBOARD. AND THEN IT'S JUST DEAD.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS? CAN YOU READ IT?

I ***BELIEVE*** SO. THIS...THIS IS ***DEVIANT*** SCRIPT.

DEVIANT? YOU MEAN OBSCENE?

NO. AND I OBJECT TO THE CONCEPT OF OBSCENITY ON A PHILOSOPHICAL LEVEL IN ANY CASE. THE DEVIANTS WERE AN ANCIENT RACE. VERY STRANGE. CREATED BY THE CELESTIALS AN UNIMAGINABLY LONG TIME AGO.

THIS...IS ***SOMETHING***, THADDEUS. VERY INTERESTING INDEED.

BAH. HOT. I'M GOING TO TAKE A DIP.

THE RIVER IS STRANGE--IT HAS BEEN SO FOR UNCOUNTED GENERATIONS. THINGS LIVE HERE THAT DO NOT LIVE ANYWHERE ELSE. DO NOT SWIM IN IT. TAKE MY ADVICE.

WHATEVER. I'VE BEATEN UP *PLENTY* OF FISH IN MY DAY.

EUGH. YOU ARE RIGHT. I TRUST YOU ***MUCH*** LESS WITHOUT THE MASK. NOT EVEN ***UNDERWEAR***, SEÑOR? WHERE IS YOUR MODESTY?

HEY, MAN, MY COSTUME IS ***SPANDEX***. I DON'T HAVE A LOT TO BE VAIN ABOUT, BUT CLEAN LINES ARE IMPORTANT.

SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE, CAPTAIN.

SPLASH

AIEEBLBBB!

SNARRR

SNRRRD

GRRAARR

AGH!

OWWWWWW

I WARNED YOU, SEÑOR. DO YOU WISH ME TO PUT YOU OUT OF YOUR MISERY?

OWWWWWW

ROSS!

WHAT IS IT?

INCOMING CHUTE.

"...HOW?"

MAKE THE CALL, ROSS. I'M DIALED IN.

NO! NOT A LEGITIMATE TARGET, CASTLE.

OHHHHH NOOOO!

DAMMIT.

ROSS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

SHREEEAAAARGHH

AAH!

THWAMM

HELLO.

HOW... HOW DID YOU SURVIVE?

I'M A STRONG SWIMMER.

THADDY! I KNEW YOU COULDN'T BE DEAD! NOT YOU!

...THADDY?

HELEN. BEEN A WHILE.

MMF!

A VERY LONG WHILE.

CONTINUED.

THUNDERBOLTS

ALL-NEW MARVEL NOW!

SOULE • DIAZ • SILVA | 025

HONDURAS.

LA MOSQUITIA. RIO PATUCA.

HELEN, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE *DOING?*

GETTING WHAT I'M *OWED*, ROSS.

NOW, YOU BETTER--

GO ON.

FINE.

WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT, HELEN?

I TOLD YOU-- WE HAVE *UNFINISHED BUSINESS*, ROSS.

OKAY. LET'S TALK. BUT NOT HERE.

YOU THINK SHE'S A *HULK*, AN *ABOMINATION* OR A *LEADER?* GOTTA BE ONE OF 'EM.

GOD, I HOPE SHE'S NOT A LEADER. LEADERS *CREEP ME OUT.*

I AM *STANDING RIGHT NEXT TO YOU.*

PLEASE PUT SOME CLOTHES ON, DEADPOOL. I AM LITERALLY *BEGGING* YOU TO GET DRESSED.

HEH. MOST OF THE TIME, ELEKTRA, PRETTY LADIES DO THE *OPPOSITE.*

NO THEY DON'T.

...

NO.

YOU CAME *BACK*, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, AND YOU DIDN'T *CALL* ME?

WAS I *SUPPOSED* TO?

DAMN RIGHT! ROSS, I'M THE PERSON WHO TOLD YOU WHATEVER'S OUT HERE IS OUT HERE IN THE *FIRST PLACE*. WE HAD A *DEAL*.

I GAVE YOU MY RESEARCH IN EXCHANGE FOR A CHANCE TO STUDY THE ARTIFACT ONCE YOUR TEAM RETRIEVED IT.

I SHARED EVERYTHING I *HAD* WITH YOU...

EVERYTHING.

AND THEN YOU JUST *DISAPPEARED*. WORD WAS YOU WERE *DEAD*.

YOU DIDN'T SEEM *THAT* ANNOYED TO SEE ME, IF THAT KISS WAS ANY INDICATION.

THAT WAS JUST TO *DISTRACT* YOU SO I COULD PULL THE GUN. DON'T THINK I ENJOYED IT.

COULD'VE FOOLED ME.

APPARENTLY, I DID. *WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST TIME*.

WHATEVER. LISTEN, HELEN, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU--I GUESS-- BUT WE NEVER *FOUND* ANYTHING LAST TIME. MY ENTIRE *TEAM* DISAPPEARED. I'M HERE TO TRY TO FIND *THEM*, NOT YOUR PRECIOUS ARTIFACT.

I DON'T OWE YOU A THING. AND EVEN IF I DID, I JUST PULLED YOUR SKINNY ASS OUT OF THAT RIVER BEFORE YOU WERE *EATEN ALIVE*.

I'D SAY WE'RE SQUARE.

I'D SAY WE'RE NOT. I'M COMING WITH YOU.

IT'LL BE DANGEROUS.

I JUST PARACHUTED ONTO A TINY BOAT IN A MONSTER-INFESTED RIVER. HOW MUCH WORSE COULD IT GET? BESIDES, YOU'LL PROTECT ME.

I WASN'T TALKING ABOUT THE *EXPEDITION*. I'M NOT THE SAME, HELEN. I'VE *CHANGED* SINCE YOU LAST KNEW ME.

LET'S HOPE SO.

KRAK

AAH!

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON? WHAT THE HELL ARE THESE THINGS?

WE'RE IN *EL PORTAL DEL INFIERNO!* THE ***GATES OF HELL!!!*** VERY DANGEROUS PART OF THE RIVER--I ***TOLD YOU!***

THESE THINGS ARE THE ***LEAST*** OF WHAT LIVES HERE-- WE'RE GOING TO ***BREAK APART!***

YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU ***DIDN'T KNOW THIS WAS COMING,*** YOU ASS?

IT'S NEVER BEEN THIS BAD-- I SWEAR! I'VE NEVER SEEN IT LIKE THIS! SOMETHING HAS MADE THEM ***ANGRY!***

UH-OH. ANYBODY GOT A STURDIER BOAT?

KRRRAK

I GOT THIS.

NNNGH!

COME ON, BLAZE! GET OFF THE DAMN BOAT!

NO PROBLEM, ROSS. EVEN IF I FELL IN, I GOT NOTHIN' TO WORRY ABOUT.

RJFFND EFFXR ENCR YB MDA ENIR N MPBC F MSREEX

NOT AS LONG AS I GOT THE--

--FLAMES?

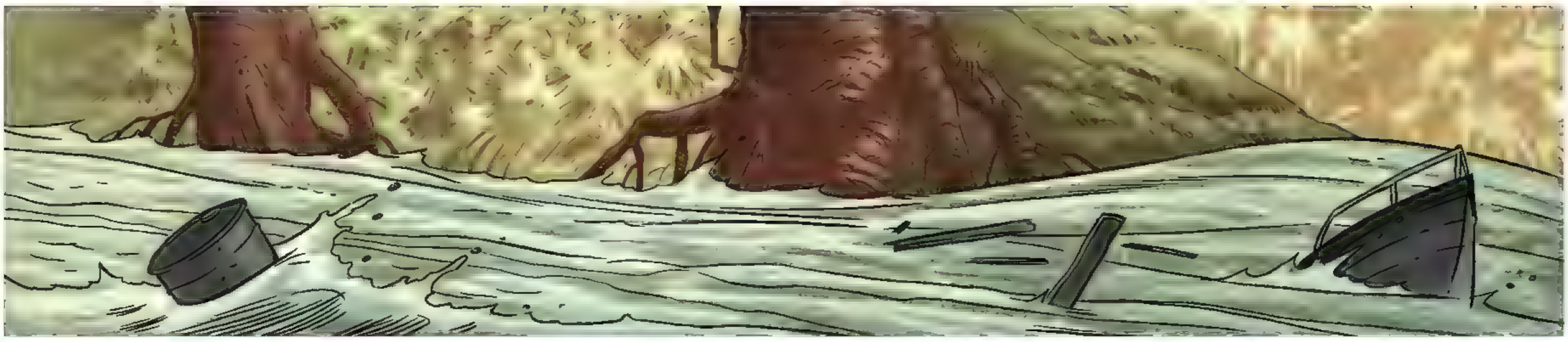
WHAT THE *HELL?*

OH, *NO.*

NOOO!

YEEARGH!

SLAM!

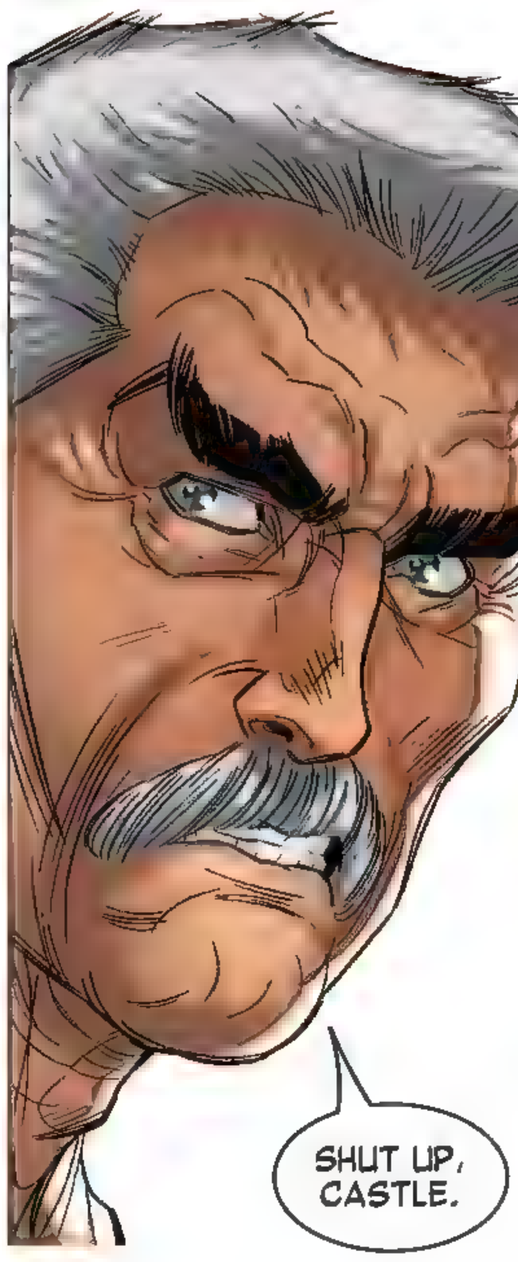


WELL. I DON'T THINK ANY OF US WERE EXPECTING *THAT* TO HAPPEN.
OH, MY GOD. IS HE...
POOR BASTARD.
POWERS. THAT'S WHAT YOU GET. NONE OF THOSE FREAKS REALLY ***KNOW*** HOW THEIR POWERS WORK, BUT THEY DEPEND ON THEM. STUPID. GIVE ME A GUN, EVERY TIME.

THAT MAN JUST SAVED YOUR *LIFE*, CASTLE!
DIDN'T ASK HIM TO.
WHAT NOW? WE SCRUBBING THE MISSION?

CORDOBA. HOW CLOSE ARE WE TO WHERE YOU LEFT MY TEAM?
FAIR ENOUGH. WE GO ON, THEN. MAYBE LET BLAZE'S DEATH ***MEAN*** SOMETHING.
NOT FAR AT ALL. A VILLAGE. WE SHOULDN'T HAVE HIT THE RAPIDS BEFORE ARRIVING THERE, BUT--

TO WHO? YOU? BECAUSE I DON'T THINK IT MEANT VERY MUCH TO ***BLAZE.***
THAT WASN'T SOME NOBLE ***SACRIFICE.*** HE SCREWED UP, AND THEN HE ***DIED.*** SEEMS TO HAPPEN TO PEOPLE UNDER YOUR COMMAND A ***LOT.*** ISN'T THAT WHY WE'RE DOWN HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE?


SHUT UP, CASTLE.

THIS IS WHERE I LEFT YOUR MEN. THEY MOVED ON, I RETURNED ALONE. AND *THAT*, ROSS, IS *THAT*.

WAS IT DESERTED, THEN?

NOT AT ALL. A STRANGE, CHEERFUL TRIBE LIVED HERE. THE VILLAGE WAS FULL OF LIFE.

AT LEAST...

...UNTIL YOUR MEN ARRIVED. LOOKS LIKE EVERYONE IN THIS VILLAGE WAS EXECUTED, GENERAL.

YOU HAVE NO PROOF MY MEN HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH THAT.

NO? NO ONE FROM *HERE* WOULD EVER ATTACK THESE PEOPLE. WE KNOW THAT THIS IS A STRANGE, SACRED PLACE.

LET ME *SEE* THAT.

THE MORPHOLOGY HERE IS ***BIZARRE***. THIS PERSON WOULD HAVE LOOKED LIKE... WELL, NOT LIKE ***US***.

I'M SORRY.

LIKE I SAID-- A ***STRANGE*** PLACE. YOU THINK EVERY RIVER IS FULL OF MONSTERS? NO.

IT CHANGED ***THESE*** PEOPLE, AND IT WILL CHANGE ALL OF ***YOU*** AS WELL. STUPID AMERICANOS.

YEAH, ***SERIOUSLY***.

I'M CANADIAN.

I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR OPINIONS, CORDOBA. IT'S GETTING DARK. WE'LL BUNK DOWN HERE TONIGHT AND PUSH ON IN THE MORNING.

I SAW WHAT YOU DID, MR. STERNS.

OH?

YOU *DID* SOMETHING. MADE THE FIRE-BOY'S FIRE GO OUT. AND THEN HE *DIED.*

OF COURSE I DID.

AND *YOU* HAVE YOUR MEN SHADOWING US, READY TO ATTACK WHEN YOU GIVE THE ORDER-- AND STEAL EITHER THIS MAP OR THE ARTIFACT, ONCE WE FIND IT. WHATEVER MAKES SENSE.

AND HOW DO YOU KNOW *THAT?*

PFFT. *OBVIOUS.*

DO YOU THINK THE OTHERS WOULD LIKE TO KNOW THAT YOU KILLED THEIR COMRADE?

AT *LEAST* AS MUCH AS THEY WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR MEN. WHOM THEY WOULD THEN PROMPTLY KILL, RIGHT BEFORE THEY KILLED *YOU.*

ALL RIGHT. WE ARE BOTH *BAD PEOPLE.* WHAT NOW, THEN?

I WILL DO WHAT I AM SO OFTEN *FORCED* TO DO AND EXPLAIN SOMETHING THAT SHOULD BE PERFECTLY CLEAR TO ANYONE WITH HALF A BRAIN.

YOU CANNOT READ THIS MAP. I AM ONE OF ONLY A FEW PEOPLE IN THE *ENTIRE WORLD* WHO CAN.

SO, THE MAP HAS NO VALUE TO YOU. *I* HAVE VALUE TO YOU. FORTUNATELY, *YOU* HAVE VALUE TO ME.

BECAUSE I WOULD *VERY MUCH* LIKE TO BE RID OF ROSS AND HIS IDIOTS, AND YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE A SMALL ARMY NEARBY.

REMOVE THE IDIOTS, AND WE WILL GO ON TO FIND THE ARTIFACT *TOGETHER.*

DID YOU NOT JUST TELL ME THAT THEY WOULD KILL MY PEOPLE IN MERE MOMENTS? HOW DO YOU PROPOSE WE *ACHIEVE* SUCH A NOBLE GOAL?

CORDOBA, IT'S SIMPLE. YOU JUST *PICK YOUR MOMENT.*

ROSS AND THAT OLD WOMAN ARE ABOUT TO HAVE SEX IN THE DIRT IN THAT HUT. THERE'S BEEN LUST IN THE AIR EVER SINCE SHE DROPPED OUT OF THE SKY.

CASTLE AND ELEKTRA NEVER MISS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RUT LIKE PIGS EITHER. I'M NO EXPERT ON ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS, BUT I WILL *NEVER* UNDERSTAND THOSE TWO.

SO. THEY'RE ALL DISTRACTED. YOU'LL NEVER GET A BETTER CHANCE.

YOU FORGOT ONE. THE CRAZY ONE. LOOKS LIKE A BURNT SAUSAGE.

AH, YES. ***DEADPOOL.*** NO ONE EVER HAS SEX WITH DEADPOOL. YOU'LL WANT TO HANDLE HIM ***FIRST.*** BUT I HAVE A SUGGESTION THERE AS WELL.

HEY, SEÑOR. YOU HUNGRY?

I AM.

HERE. I COOKED YOU A FROG.

ANY GOOD?

IMPOSSIBLY DELICIOUS. OR SO I AM TOLD. I WOULD NEVER EAT IT, MYSELF.

UHH...WHY NOT?

IT IS FILLED WITH A DEADLY POISON. OLD MEN FROM THIS REGION EAT IT AS THEIR FINAL MEAL, TO KNOW TRUE GUSTATORY BLISS BEFORE THEIR FINAL BREATH.

BUT *YOU*, MY FRIEND--I HAVE SEEN YOU RECOVER FROM BEING BITTEN IN HALF. *YOU* COULD EAT THIS, AND BE THE ONE PERSON WHO HAS DONE SO AND *LIVED!*

HOW DO THEY *KNOW?* I MEAN, IF IT KILLS THEM, HOW DO THEY KNOW IT'S SO GREAT?

EH, WHY NOT?

KRRNCH

WHOA... THAT'S--

KILL THEM ALL--EXCEPT FOR THE RED ONE WITH THE LARGE HEAD. HE STAYS ALIVE. FOR NOW.

GO QUIETLY. DON'T GET LOUD UNTIL YOU MUST. A SLIT THROAT IS BETTER THAN A GUNSHOT.

GO.

THUD

WAKE UP! CORDOBA IS ATTACKING THE CAMP! OH, *DEAR*, OH, *NO!!!*

GET UP!!!

AACK!

BANG BANG

STERNS, YOU WILL *BURN* FOR THIS!!!

UH-HUH.

DO WE HUNT THEM DOWN?

JUNGLE FIGHTING, OUT HERE, AT NIGHT? WITH THE KIND OF FREAKY THINGS WE'VE SEEN SO FAR? I DON'T LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT.

I DO.

I DON'T WANT TO TAKE THE TIME. FOR NOW, LET'S POST GUARDS AND MOVE OUT IN THE MORNING. CORDOBA'S COWARDS AREN'T COMING BACK ANY TIME SOON.

AND WHEN DEADPOOL WAKES UP, SOMEONE SHOOT HIM. SLEPT RIGHT THROUGH THE DAMN FIGHT.

MY GOD, I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S *REAL.*

STERNS--CAN WE JUST WALK IN? FIND MY TEAM AND GET OUT?

OF COURSE NOT. ACCORDING TO THE MAP, IT'S PROTECTED BY THE TYPICAL ARRAY OF TERRIBLE TRAPS AND PUZZLES.

BUT YOU CAN GET US THROUGH THOSE, RIGHT?

CERTAINLY. IF YOU PROTECT ME PROPERLY ONCE WE'RE IN, I'LL GET US TO THE CENTER OF THE TEMPLE. ACCORDING TO THE MAP, THAT'S WHERE THE ARTIFACT RESTS.

NOPE.

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN?* I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN *READ* THE MAP. I *HAVE* TO GO IN.

YOU CAN GUIDE US OVER THE RADIO JUST AS EASILY, STERNS. LOOK, I WATCHED YOU OUTFOX MEPHISTO, FOR GOD'S SAKE. I KNOW WHAT YOU BRING TO THE TEAM.

BUT IF YOU THINK I'M GOING TO LET THE DAMN *LEADER* NEAR AN ARTIFACT OF ABSOLUTE POWER, YOU'RE KIDDING YOURSELF.

THEN HOW DO YOU PRESUME TO CONVINCE ME TO HELP YOU NOW?

SAME AS EVER. YOU KNOW WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF.

I DO. AND YOU WORRY ABOUT *ME* GETTING MY HANDS ON THAT ARTIFACT.

VERY WELL.

DEADPOOL--YOU STAY OUT HERE WITH STERNS. PROTECT HIM IN CASE CORDOBA COMES BACK. KEEP HIM ALIVE.

UNLESS IT SEEMS LIKE HE'S TRYING TO BETRAY US. IF *THAT* HAPPENS, KILL HIM.

AYE-AYE, CAP'N.

STERNS, HOW DO WE GET PAST THIS DOOR?

JUST PUT IN THE COMBINATION. I'LL READ IT OFF FOR YOU. LISTEN CAREFULLY. IF YOU GET IT WRONG, YOU'LL BE DISINTEGRATED BY SOME SORT OF DEATH RAY. I'LL TRY TO SPEAK CLEARLY.

STERNS...

JUST A LITTLE JOKE, ROSS.

BUT THERE REALLY IS A DEATH RAY. NOW PAY ATTENTION.

I AM THE JUNGLE.

I AM THE GREEN HELL.

RRRRIPP

I AM DEATH ITSELF.

AND I WILL PROTECT YOU, SAMUEL STERNS!

LOVELY.

I'M THE JUNGLE!

WHICH TUNNEL?

HOW THE HELL SHOULD I KNOW?

STERNS, WHICH WAY?

I'M SORRY, THADDEUS, BUT THE MAP IS UNCLEAR. IT LOOKS LIKE YOU COULD GO **EITHER** WAY. YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A LARGE CRYSTAL STATUE OF A JACKAL.

FIND THAT, AND YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT PATH.

SPLIT UP?

YES. IT'LL BE MORE EFFICIENT. WE'LL REGROUP HERE IN FIFTEEN MINUTES. IF NEITHER TEAM'S FOUND THIS DAMN STATUE BY THEN, WE'LL FIGURE OUT SOMETHING ELSE.

ALL RIGHT.

OOPS.

KRAK

DO YOU WISH WE'D TURNED BACK AFTER BLAZE?

OF COURSE.

BUT YOU FOLLOW THE ORDERS YOU'RE GIVEN. YOU JUST GET THROUGH IT, HOWEVER YOU CAN. I'VE TOLD YOU. I'LL STAY AS LONG AS YOU DO.

THERE'S MORE TO THIS THAN JUST ROSS' FINDING HIS OLD TEAM. HE TOLD ME. WHATEVER'S HERE, IT COULD DESTROY EVERYTHING. THAT'S WHY I'M STILL HERE.

...

THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING.

STERNS IS GOING TO BETRAY US.

OF COURSE. I THINK HE PROBABLY ALREADY DID. STAY ALERT.

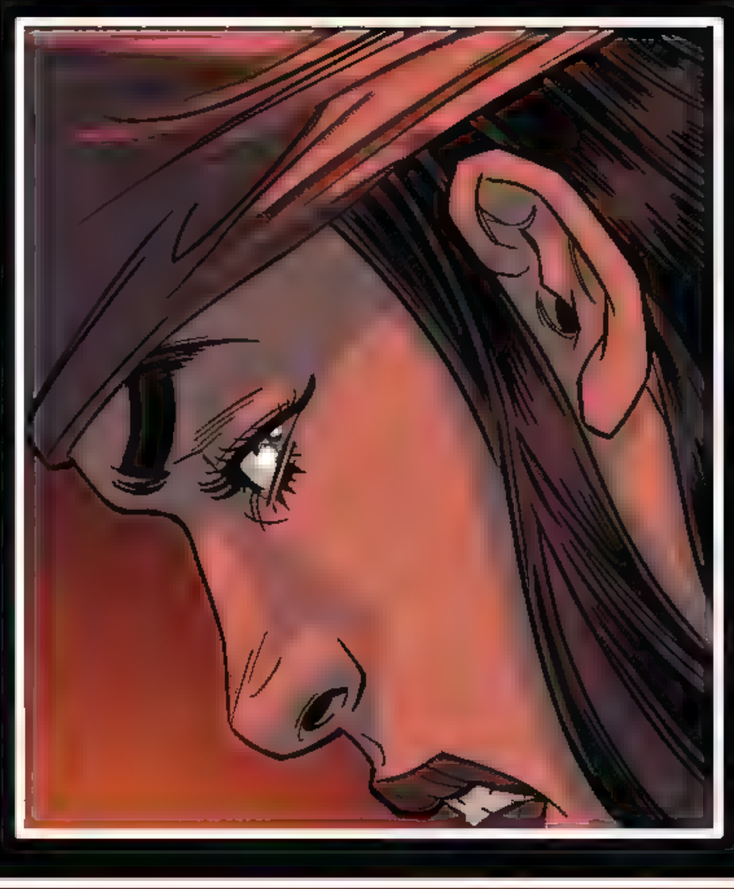
%&#.

KLIK

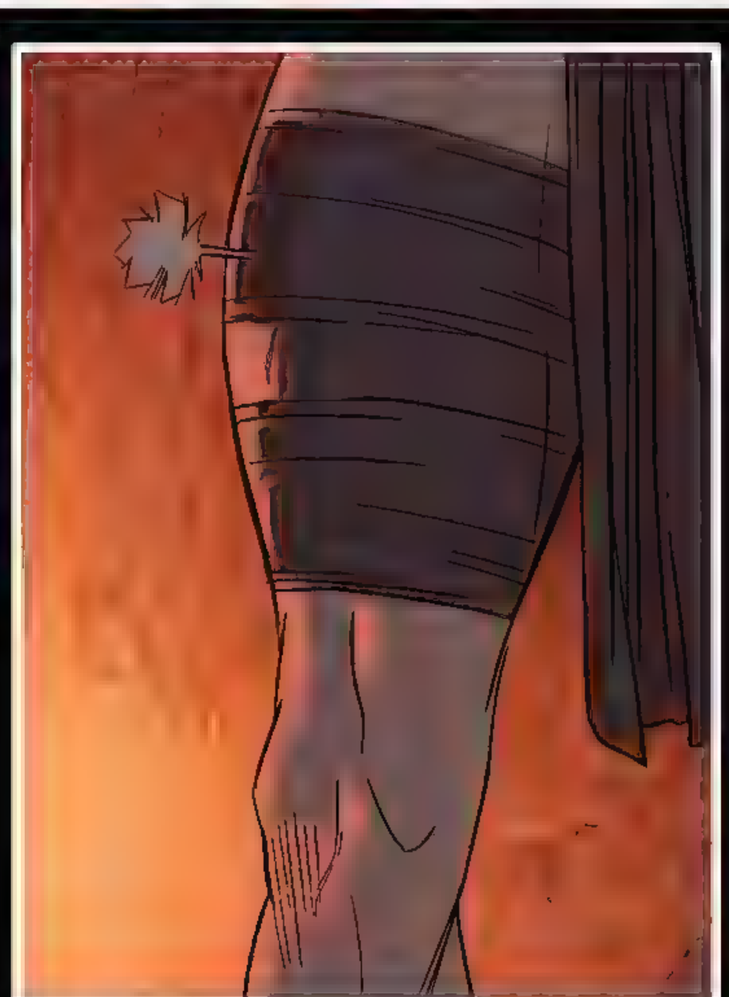
NGH!

KRRAK

SHE'S BACK



NO PROBLEM. NOW, LET'S SEE... ABOUT...THAT...
ELEKTRA... YOU...



UUUUUNNNHHH

PAR...A... LYTIC. CAN'T... MOVE.

WHY DID YOU DO THAT? FOR ME?

YOU SAVED... ME...FROM MERCY. OWED YOU.

SO STUPID. I'M...NOT WORTH IT, ELEKTRA. THINGS I'VE DONE...YOU DON'T KNOW...

SHH.

GRRRNG

CAN'T...STOP THEM. DAMMIT, I DON'T HAVE MY GEAR. LOST IT ON THE DAMN BOAT.

FRANK. FRANK. COME BACK.

NO! I CAN FIND A WAY. THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY.

IT'S ALL RIGHT, FRANK. COME BACK.

THE WALLS.

GRRRNG

IS THIS...

I...THINK SO.

NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE LIKE *THIS*. THOUGHT I'D TAKE ONE TO THE HEAD.

HONESTLY... FRANK...

KRAK

HSSS

...BEST WAY I'VE EVER GONE.

SPLAT

CONTINUED.

THUNDERBOLTS

ALL-NEW MARVEL NOW!

CHARLES SOULE
PACO DIAZ
ISRAEL SILVA

026

HONDURAS.

THIS IS THE END.

TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS TO THE MAN WHO BRINGS ME THE HEAD OF SAMUEL STERNS!

IT IS THE PERFECT SHAPE TO TURN INTO A *TOILET BOWL*, AND THAT TRAITOROUS RED BASTARD *DESERVES NO BETTER*.

KILL THE REST, TOO. *NONE* OF THEM LEAVE THIS JUNGLE ALIVE.

YES, *SEÑOR* CORDOBA.

URK!

WHA--?

STAND YOUR GROUND--THEY CANNOT TAKE US IF WE *STAND OUR GROUND!*

SWWSH!

AGH!

GHNK

NNYAH!

BLAM

BLAM

BLAM

KK... KK...

SHLUKKK

IT'S JUST THE UGLY ONE-- HE'S *ALONE*. PLEASE, *FOCUS*. WE CAN STILL GET HIM.

HOW, CORDOBA? YOU HAVE KILLED US ALL.

YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT.

I LIKE YOUR MUSTACHE, THOUGH.

YOU CAN GO LAST.

SHK

BUT YOU STILL GOTTA GO.

NO!

NNF

COME ON, REALLY? SO MUCH FOR MACHISMO.

ALMOST DONE, I THINK.

ACH!

AH.

I MAY DIE, BUT I KILL *YOU* BEFORE I GO. *YOU* ARE THE MONST--

NNNOPE!

URK!

THANK YOU, DEADPOOL.

PLEASE, *SEÑOR!* DO NOT KILL ME! I CAN STILL HELP YOU!

I THINK I'LL BE ALL RIGHT. BUT THANK YOU.

YOU, THOUGH-- ALL THAT RUNNING, YOU MUST BE ***STARVING.***

NO, I...

DON'T WORRY, CORDOBA. LET ME GET YOU A SNACK.

REMEMBER THIS LITTLE GUY?

YOU WERE RIGHT. IT WAS ABSOLUTELY DELICIOUS.

OH, NO.

TRY IT.

NO, PLEASE...

YOU TRIED TO KILL MY ENTIRE TEAM. I EVEN *LIKE* A FEW OF THEM.

PAL, WE'RE PRETTY MUCH DONE HERE.

SO EAT THE %#&* POISON FROG, OR I'LL PUT A BULLET IN YOUR EYE. YOUR CALL. I'M GOOD EITHER WAY, BUT I LIKE THE FROG BECAUSE IT'S... YOU KNOW...A FITTING END. SYMMETRICAL.

EVERYONE LIKES CLOSURE, YOU KNOW?

FINISHED?

YEP.

GOOD. THE OTHERS RADIOED IN--ASKED US TO JOIN THEM.

YEAH? ALL RIGHT. GOOD DEAL. I'M *DYING* TO SEE WHAT'S IN THAT TEMPLE.

THEN YOU'RE IN LUCK.

YOU DON'T WANT TO GO IN THE MAIN DOOR? ISN'T THAT WHERE YOU SENT THE OTHERS?

YES...BUT UPON FURTHER STUDY OF THIS MAP, I DISCOVERED A SECOND, *HIDDEN* ENTRANCE. SHOULD TAKE US RIGHT TO THE CENTRAL CHAMBER, AND SKIP US PAST ALL THE TRAPS.

I THINK IT'S... RIGHT...

...HERE.

KLIK

PERFECT.

PERFECT FOR WHO? MOLA RAM?

I LIKE MY HEART WHERE IT IS, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

UNLESS... ARE THERE SANKARA STONES IN HERE?

PROBABLY NOT.

I THINK WE'RE GETTING CLOSE, ROSS. WHOLE PLACE FEELS LIKE IT'S *VIBRATING*.

DO YOU THINK YOUR TEAM GOT THIS FAR?

OH, I'M PRETTY SURE THEY DID, YEAH.

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

HELEN, LISTEN. IT'S PROBABLY TIME YOU KNEW WHAT YOU WERE GETTING INTO.

YOUR RESEARCH SUGGESTED THERE WAS SOMETHING DOWN HERE, SOMETHING POWERFUL. I *DID* SEND A TEAM AFTER IT. ALL OF THAT'S TRUE.

BUT THEY *FOUND* IT--OR AT LEAST ONE OF THEM DID. MANCUSO.

"HE *APPEARED* TO ME, LIKE A VISION. TOLD ME HE'D END THE WORLD UNLESS I CAME TO SEE HIM. I BELIEVED IT. WHATEVER HE FOUND DOWN HERE... IT *CHANGED* HIM.

"*THAT'S* WHY I'M HERE. TO LEARN THE TRUTH, BUT ALSO TO *STOP* HIM, IF I CAN.

"I'M NOT SURE HOW SAFE IT'S GOING TO BE. I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE, BUT IF YOU WANT TO TURN BACK, I'D GET IT."

YOU'RE NUTS. I'M A *SCIENTIST*, AND I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR THIS THING *MY ENTIRE ADULT LIFE*.

I'M WITH YOU TO THE BITTER END.

ASSUMING WE CAN GET THROUGH *THIS*, THAT IS.

DON'T WORRY. I CAN HANDLE IT. STEP BACK A WAYS.

HOW? IT'S HUGE! SOLID STONE!

KRRK

I'M STRONGER THAN I LOOK.

NOT YOURS.

MY GOD.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP BACK THERE, DEADPOOL. I DON'T KNOW HOW I WOULD HAVE MADE IT THROUGH WITHOUT YOU.

UH-HUH. MY PLEASURE.

I REALLY THINK THIS TEAM IS ***FINALLY*** COMING TOGETHER, DON'T YOU?

ALL WE REALLY NEEDED WAS SOME STRONG LEADERSHIP, IF YOU ASK ME.

UH-HUH.

WAIT! STOP! DON'T STEP THERE!

HUH? WHY NOT?

PUT YOUR FOOT DOWN ***THERE.*** THAT'S SAFE.

THERE'S A TRAP! THAT STONE'S THE TRIGGER. YOU CAN'T STEP THERE.

UH-HUH.

YOU KNOW, YOU TALK IN YOUR SLEEP.

WHAT? NONSENSE! AND HOW WOULD YOU KNOW THAT? DO YOU *WATCH ME* WHILE I SLEEP?

I WATCH *EVERYONE* WHILE THEY SLEEP. FRANK HAS AWFUL DREAMS, I THINK.

WHAT IS YOUR *POINT*, DEADPOOL?

MY POINT IS THAT THE OTHERS THINK YOU'RE *FRIENDLY*, BECAUSE YOU HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING *OVERTLY* TERRIBLE.

YOU WORK HARD TO CONVINCE US THAT YOU'RE *HARMLESS*. JUST USEFUL ENOUGH TO KEEP AROUND, TO KEEP *SAFE*. BUT I'VE HEARD YOU TALK IN YOUR SLEEP. I KNOW THE TRUTH.

IT'S THE SAME WITH ME. PEOPLE ASSUME I'M DUMB, BECAUSE I'M *FUN*, AND SOME OF THE THINGS I DO DON'T *LOOK* SMART.

BUT I'M NOT *DUMB*. AND YOU'RE NOT *FRIENDLY*.

SHKK

I...

AND YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT PEOPLE WHO *ASSUME* THINGS...

...I STAB THEM.

NNNNGH

"ASSUME SOMETHING, AND DEADPOOL WILL STAB YOU." THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY.

YOU--

MIGHT BE A CANADIAN THING.

...YOU...

MORON!

KLIK

HEY, THAT'S NOT N--

WHOOPS!

SCRCH

SCRCH

AAGH!

DUMB ENOUGH.

CENSORED

SCRCH

SCRCH

LET'S JUST...SEE... WHAT WE CAN... SEE.

WHAT... *IS* THAT?

THAT IS THE HEAD OF AN INFANT CELESTIAL. THEY MADE US, AND WE WORSHIPPED THEM. THIS PLACE WAS THE SEAT OF OUR POWER, LOST TO RUMORS AND CONJECTURE.

I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR IT MY ENTIRE LIFE. HUNDREDS OF YEARS.

WAIT. DID YOU SAY *HUNDREDS?*

I DID.

AND I DON'T INTEND TO *SHARE IT.*

AAGH!

STAB

OH, NO?

H-HOW?

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DO THAT PRESTO-CHANGE-O STUFF. WHAT *ARE* YOU, ANYWAY?

I AM A *DEVIANT!* ONE OF THE LAST OF MY KIND.

THE SPACE GODS CREATED MY PEOPLE MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO. WE WERE A *FAILED EXPERIMENT*-- TO *THEM.*

SO WE *KILLED* ONE OF THEIR CHILDREN, PUT ITS HEAD HERE AND LET ITS BLOOD SLOWLY CHANGE THE WORLD INTO ONE THAT WE COULD *RULE.*

A WORLD OF *MONSTERS.*

IT WAS JUST A *LEGEND* AMONG THE DEVIANTS, A FAIRY TALE TO TELL OUR YOUNG--THE PROMISE OF A BETTER WORLD WE WERE NEVER ALLOWED TO HAVE.

AND ALL ALONG, IT WAS *TRUE*, AND IT WAS *WORKING*, UNTIL YOUR *TEAM* CAME ALONG AND STOPPED IT.

WHATEVER. I'VE HEARD THIS STUFF A MILLION TIMES BEFORE. ALL I'M THINKING RIGHT NOW IS, *"UGH. I SLEPT WITH THAT THING."*

RRAAGGH!

BZZZA

UH...

HELLO, GENERAL.

MANCUSO?

IS THAT... WHAT *HAPPENED* TO YOU?

I FOUND WHAT YOU SENT ME TO FIND, GENERAL. YOU WERE RIGHT. THERE IS *IMMENSE* POWER HERE.

MORE THAN ENOUGH TO DESTROY A HULK.

HARRING AND PORTER, I'M GUESSING? WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?

I KILLED THEM. WHEN WE FIRST MADE IT INTO THE TEMPLE, THERE WAS SOME...*DISCUSSION* ABOUT WHO WOULD BE THE FIRST TO TASTE THE CELESTIAL'S BLOOD. WE ALL WANTED IT.

YOU *MURDERED* THEM. YOUR OWN MEN.

YES. BUT I AM PAST THAT NOW.

NNNNGH

THAT'S RIGHT. KEEP HIM... TALKING, FOOL. IT'S... ALMOST...*MINE*. I CAN *SMELL* IT.

YOU KNOW I HAVE TO TAKE YOU DOWN.

PERHAPS.

IS THAT WHY YOU WANTED ME TO FIND YOU? SO I COULD *KILL* YOU?

I THOUGHT WE COULD *TALK* FIRST.

YE--BLBBB-SSS!!!

YESSS... *YES!* I CAN...I CAN CALCULATE *ANYTHING*.

THE *CALCULATIONS*. THE UNIVERSE...I CAN...IT'S ALL... HERE...IF I JUST *PUSH* HARD EN--

...WAIT.

GLUTCH

SO *TALK*.

YOU GATHERED A TEAM TOGETHER IN AN EFFORT TO ATONE FOR YOUR PAST MISTAKES.

SEVEN ***KILLERS***. ONE FLED BECAUSE HE FEARED WHAT YOU WERE TURNING HIM INTO, AND ANOTHER YOU REWARDED BY SENDING HER TO HELL. THE REST ARE DEAD.

NO...THEY AREN'T ***ALL***...WHY ARE YOU SHOWING ME THIS? WHAT DO YOU ***WANT***?

THADDEUS ROSS, YOU ARE AN UNKILLABLE ***MONSTER***.

FOR YEARS, DECADES, YOU HAVE GATHERED PEOPLE TO YOU FOR YOUR ***CRUSADES***, AND THOSE PEOPLE ***DIE***. AFTER WHICH YOU FIND ***NEW*** CRUSADES, AND ***NEW*** GRIST FOR YOUR MILL.

WHEN YOU WERE SIMPLY AN ***OLD MAN***, THAT WAS ONE THING--EVENTUALLY, YOU WOULD BE GONE, AND YOUR HORRORS WITH YOU.

BUT NOW, YOU ARE A ***HULK***. YOU COULD KEEP GOING FOR A VERY...LONG...TIME.

AND THAT WORRIES ***YOU*** MOST OF ALL. YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW LONG YOU'LL LIVE--HOW LONG YOU WILL HAVE TO ENDURE YOUR ***GUILT***, YOUR ***UNFINISHED BUSINESS***.

THIS LATEST TEAM WAS AN ATTEMPT TO STAVE THAT OFF. IT ***FAILED***.

SO WHY DON'T YOU JUST ***KILL*** ME, THEN? PUT ME OUT OF MY DAMN MISERY! ISN'T THAT WHY YOU BROUGHT ME HERE?

I ***SHOULD***. AND YET...I CAN ***SEE*** THINGS NOW. I CAN SEE HOW EVERYTHING ***FITS TOGETHER***.

I GET TO DECIDE WHAT THE PUZZLE WILL LOOK LIKE ONCE IT'S ASSEMBLED. I GET TO MAKE ***CHOICES*** NOW, GENERAL.

THAT IS WHY I BROUGHT YOU HERE.

YOU ARE ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL BEINGS IN THE WORLD, AND NOT JUST BECAUSE OF YOUR STRENGTH. YOU ARE A ***LEADER OF MEN***.

YOU USE YOUR IMMENSE POWER ONLY FOR ***YOURSELF***. BUT WHAT IF YOU COULD TURN TO A ***NEW*** PATH? IMAGINE WHAT YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE IF YOU TURNED THAT POWER ***OUTWARDS***.

STOP BEING SO %&*$ ***SELFISH***, GENERAL.

I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

YES, YOU DO. I AM OFFERING YOU A CHOICE. I ***CAN*** KILL YOU. I HAVE THAT POWER. YOU CAN BE ***FINISHED***...WITH ALL OF IT. YOUR PORTION OF THE PUZZLE WOULD BE ***DARK***, WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE.

OR YOU COULD BE ***LIGHT***. THAT'S MY PREFERENCE, AND WHY YOU ARE HERE. I THINK WE'VE HAD ***ENOUGH*** DARKNESS.

BUT THADDEUS, THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

WHAT NOW, ROSS? IT'S YOUR CALL FOR THE NEXT MISSION, I THINK.

YEAH. I'VE GOT SOMETHING TEED UP IN CENTRAL AMERICA. HONDURAS.

SHOULD BE A PIECE OF CAKE. I THINK YOU'LL LIKE IT, ACTUALLY. IT'S...

IT'S...

NAH.

LET'S TRY SOMETHING *DIFFERENT.*

ROSS

THE TEAM IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE TEAM! SEE YA, GUYS, IT'S BEEN FANTASTIC!
--CDS

END.

"This comic series is good. Really good."
— IGN.com

GHOST RIDER JOINS THE THUNDERBOLTS!

General Ross recruited the T-Bolts to clean up the problems no one else could — but he didn't anticipate trouble with Mercy! The seemingly all-powerful madwoman is consumed with bloodlust and has begun slaughtering innocent people to fulfill her twisted mission. To stop her, Ross needs help from Johnny Blaze, the original Ghost Rider! Can the Spirit of Vengeance save the team before it all goes, quite literally, to hell? And when things go south, will the team make a deal with the devil to get home? Then, the Thunderbolts battle Venom! Finally, when an ancient cosmic power corrupts a former ally, the T-Bolts must travel deep into a Central American jungle. But the clock is ticking for the tempestuous team.

Collecting *Thunderbolts (2012) #20-26* — written by Charles Soule, and illustrated by Carlo Barberi and Paco Diaz Luque with Kim Jacinto.

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